By the same Author

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THE WHITE SAHIBS IN INDIA

M-8

Principal,
Gramsevak Training Centre,
PARLI

Reginald Reynolds

TO LIVE IN MANKIND

A Quest for Gandhi

To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name

VACHELL LINDSAY

R. E. T. C.
LIBRARY,
BHAVANISAGAR.

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NOTE ON NAMES

Gandhi was known by a number of names and I have used some of them in their various forms. It should not be difficult to remember that Gandhi, Gandhiji, Bapu, Bapuji, the Mahatma or Mahatmaji all refer to the same person. (Russian variations, including patronymics, as used, e.g., by Tolstoy, can be much more confusing.)

In compensation for this I have avoided using the new names of former provinces (now States) which did not, in fact, come into use constitutionally until the day I left India, last year. To many who knew a little of India in past years it will be more helpful to find references to the United or Central Provinces than to be confronted by Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. But the future traveller will be wise to make himself familiar with these and many other names not to be found on the old maps.

R. R.

The author's thanks are due to Ethel Mannin for her help in reading the proofs of this book.

FOR
MAYA, MANU AND GAUTAM
WHEN THEY ARE OLDER

CHAPTER ONE

And, snug as Jonah in the Whale,
You may loll back and dream a tale.

COLERIDGE

We are at Port Said. It is raining and I am in the hospital of the *Stratheden*, bound for Tilbury. It is still early February, and immediate prospects are altogether somewhat cheerless for anyone with a chill on the kidneys, or whatever fancy name they give it nowadays.

But at least I am not regretting my inability to visit the emporium of Simon Arzt, or to run the gauntlet of those cosmopolitan touts who line the bazaars. Novelty, I suppose, was the only attraction of the place when I arrived here, in 1929, on my first voyage to the East.

I was twenty-four then, and the whole thing was a grand adventure. I sailed in late September, when warmth still clung to the western seas. The arrival at Port Said was the first peak of excitement. This was the East, and my own initiation. Before dawn I heard the great cables clang, the shouts from ship to shore; and from a bathroom porthole I saw a flaming football pushed suddenly over the rim of the earth. Someone had told me 'the East begins where men wear their shirts outside their trousers'. There was now no doubt that I had already arrived.

At Port Said, on that first trip, we stayed some hours for coal. I had not until then realised quite how abrupt could be the change in – say – the value of a human being. From the grey hours onwards there was a ceaseless moaning noise, and when I came first on deck I realised that the sound was made by Arabs who were bringing the coal on board. In endless procession they panted up the gangways, at the foot of which overseers of some sort stood with lengths of rope. The rope's end was used to flick nonchalantly at the sweating bodies as they passed – not hard, so far as I could judge, but as part of a ritual, no doubt preserved since the time of the Pharaohs. After I had explored my first Eastern town I was astonished to find many of these labourers asleep on the deck of the ship, lying among the grime and breathing the coal dust. I can still recall vividly the mixed odour of coal and sweat.

I was shocked and depressed, but not discouraged in my belief that contact with the East would yet prove exhilarating. In this, indeed, I was not disappointed, except for the two days which I spent in Bombay. Apart from the fortunate few who live on one of the hills outside the city, the people of Bombay breathe the atmosphere of a Turkish bath after the monsoons – and that was my first impression of India on my arrival. But I had no need to remain long in this enervating place – I was on my way to Sabarmati, the *ashram* of Mahatma Gandhi, for a stay of indefinite duration.

Europeans are rare, even today, in the *ashrams* of India; in 1929 they were even rarer. I shall not attempt to define an *ashram*. One differs a good deal from another, and before I have finished this book I shall have described a few individually; but I could no more define them generically than I could define a tree. I had not said much to my travelling acquaintances on the ship about my plans in India, for these plans were too absurdly vague to be quite credible. The result had been a certain air of mystery about my intentions, increasing general curiosity.

Even on my recent visit an affable Punjabi accosted me on a railway station and the result was the following curious dialogue:

'Good day, sir, you are here on business?'

'No.'

'You are not selling anything?' (with surprise).

'No.'

Bewilderment was followed by a look of enlightenment and the catechism continued:

'You are in one of the Services?'

'No.' I had to keep it up, just to see how far he would go and on what lines.

' "No . . . No . . . No!" Then you are travelling for pleasure?'

'No.'

I hope I was not unfriendly. His persistence fascinated me as much as the three grooves into which his curiosity overflowed. With a little more reflection he might have considered me next as a possible missionary, but he did not. 'Not on business,' he said, in a tone that was half amused and half expostulatory, 'not in the Services and not here on pleasure!' In 1950 I could at least have given my questioner a simple, positive answer, had he cared to put his question in four simple words. It was with a slight regret that I watched him shuffle off, instead, to tell the whole incredible story to one of his friends.

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But on the ship which brought me to India in 1929 those of my companions who had asked quite directly why I was going had received evasive answers. How could I put into a form that hard-boiled businessmen, Civil servants, Army people and the like would appreciate, the unsorted mixture of romance, politics, escapism, curiosity and other ingredients which was propelling me to India?

My reticence had been the occasion of many misgivings. Like the Punjabi gentleman, the Europeans on that ship knew that a person might travel to India to sell something or as a member of the Services. They would have allowed the third possibility of travelling for pleasure and admitted a fourth, as some of my fellow travellers were wives of missionaries rejoining their husbands in what they called 'The Field'. (I have known a number of missionaries and often tried to find out about this Field, but without success. I have always visualised it as a good-sized meadow where missionaries are perpetually busy with sickles.) But I cannot have looked sufficiently affluent for one who travels for pleasure, and the missionary *memsahibs* must have reported that I had failed to give the countersign. Then, in some embarrassment, one man who had been more friendly with me than most of the passengers (and nearly all were good-natured, kindly people in their relations with me) had drawn me aside for a Few Words of Advice from an Older Man.

What it had all amounted to was this. I was young. I travelled alone. Other people had definite jobs to go to, which was right and regular. I had not. It was nobody's business to quiz me and my friend was not going to. But some of them had been talking about me and they were concerned that I should not get Wrong Ideas into my head. I was (God help me) the type of bright young man who would probably want to write a book. Anybody could see I was a writer by observing the amount of writing I did and using his powers of deduction. There had been far too many cold-weather tourists popping into India for a few months and then writing books that did 'a lot of harm over there'. And so on.

Somebody's happy hunting ground was evidently menaced. The same man – one of the few of that voyage whom I later met in India – put the matter more bluntly when he said to me in Calcutta that the country was 'the flesh-pots of Egypt to us'. I listened to his advice on both occasions, and to a degree which astonishes me I find that I took it. The book my friend dreaded was not written, unless it could be said that I am writing it now. I returned to England in the

summer of 1930, studied Indian economic and social history in my spare time for seven years, and produced my first book when I was thirty-two. It is true that my book was about India, but it was certainly not an account of the few months that I had spent there. My journals of that journey have remained unpublished – they are among the material which I am now using for the first time.

The Sabarmati *ashram*, for which I left Bombay so precipitately in 1929, is near Ahmedabad – a night's journey to the north of Bombay and sufficiently inland to be free from that humidity which had so distressed me on arrival. I travelled second class on that journey, also on some of my last journeys in 1930, when I was ill. Otherwise my travels on my first visit to India were all by third class, or 'Inter.' when there were no third-class carriages on the train. ('Inter.' was a fourth class, between second and third. The old 'Inter.' coaches are still in use, I find, but most of them are labelled 'Class II', with an appropriate increase in the cost of using them.)

One result of travelling second class was that I unrolled my newly-purchased bedding,[1] put on pyjamas, and went very soundly to sleep. I woke to find the train actually standing at Ahmedabad station, and – being quite unused to the ways of Indian trains – I jumped on to the platform in my pyjamas, having rolled most of my clothes hurriedly into my bedding. The train, of course, had I but known, probably remained another half hour at the station, while people argued about reservations with the inspector and with each other, going from end to end of the platform accompanied by coolies burdened with impossible weights of cumbersome and quite unbelievable luggage. (I refer, for example, to those heavy bronze vessels and other peculiar necessities of life which sometimes make even a *sadhu* on the road look like a rag-and-bone man doing a side-line in ironmongery.)

I said '*Gandhi Ashram*' to a *tonga-wallah* (that is to say, a wallah who drives a *tonga*), and to my relief he repeated it clearly. It was early, by my standard, when the skinny horse halted at Sabarmati – about 8 or 9 a.m. – but the *ashram* had begun its day at 4. The sprawling mill town of Ahmedabad had not, at that time, spread far in the Sabarmati direction. The *ashram* was about three miles from the town, with a river between, which was still quite broad and

[1] In India one learns the meaning of the expression: 'Take up thy bed and walk.' Only wealthy hosts provide bedding – it is normally assumed that the visitor will have brought it with him.

swift, recently replenished by the monsoons. Altogether, it looked good.

This place, to which I had come for a stay of unknown duration, appeared as a collection of pleasantly proportioned buildings, mostly of one storey, and surrounded by verandahs. I was met by a few people in white *khaddar*, the hand-spun and hand-woven cloth which distinguished the active *Gandhi-wallahs* and Congress workers. They were expecting me, but explained that Gandhi was away from the *ashram* and would not be back for about three weeks. (He was, so far as I remember, on a speaking tour in another part of the country.) I was taken to a room overlooking the water; and a few minutes after my arrival I enjoyed, for the first time in my life, the ecstasy of swimming in a swift Indian river. My body was carried without effort by waters that cooled but never chilled. I have never experienced the same sensuous joy when swimming in Europe, except once in the Rhine, at Basle, during the record heat-wave of 1947. It is curious that my first impression of the austere life of Sabarmati should be perpetually associated with such voluptuous sensations.

It is necessary to turn to my original journal letters of that time, written for the information of a few friends in England, in order to recall accurately the details of my life at Sabarmati, while waiting for Gandhi to return. I was not the only European living there. Some four years previously 'Mirabehn' had come to the *ashram*, but Mira, bless her heart, can wait – this is my story and not hers; and at the moment it is the story of the circumstances in which I came to know Mahatma Gandhi. For without some effort to describe my association with him and with Sabarmati twenty years ago I can explain very little about my second visit to India, in 1949, or even why I returned at all.

Many forgotten incidents and impressions come back to my memory as I read my journals. I evidently noted the better physique of the country people after having seen only Bombay and Ahmedabad, as I drove along the road on my first journey to Sabarmati. They appeared sturdy and self-reliant as they passed, many of them carrying great weights on their heads, singing and talking on their way across the dry, sandy plain. I noticed the monkeys playing in the road on my arrival at the *ashram*, 'a strange place, half farm, half monastery'. I had not yet made the acquaintance of the technical school where ginning, carding, spinning and weaving were taught. I appear to have ignored also, in my first impressions, the school

where the children were being taught on lines probably not very different from those which have since become well known in India – for it must surely have been here that Gandhi's conception of 'Basic Education' was evolved. But I played with the youngsters in the river and found them in many ways the easiest company in this strange place with its unfamiliar cultural tradition.

Then there was the C.I.D. man who was on my track within an hour of my arrival, wanting to know all about me. And there was my first reaction to Indian music when I attended the *ashram* prayers, held in the early morning and in the evening on a patch of sand above the river. It took me a long time to develop any appreciation of Indian music and even today I find some of it hard going. It was soon clear, in fact, that life at Sabarmati was going to need more patience than I had supposed. Patience was not my strong point; but I had gone to India with a determination to make amends, so far as one person could do so, for all the degradation that Indians had suffered from the British. When I thought of that I found that I could generally put up with most things – chanting that sounded monotonous and threatened to be interminable, neighbours who seemed incapable of reading to themselves without reading aloud, people who came and stared at one in silence or – worse still – engaged one without warning in major questions about God or Western Civilisation.

Until Gandhi arrived at the *ashram* there were no outstanding personalities at Sabarmati, except Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, a man endowed with what is sometimes called 'charm'. But there were some rather bogus people whose presence made it harder to appreciate the place and its real purpose. One, I remember, was a man who had fasted for fifty-five days and lost his memory for about three months afterwards. I noted that his memory, so far as the fast was concerned, had evidently returned to him, as he continually referred to it. Himself, his fast and the state of his health (on which he volunteered information every time one met him) were his sole subjects of conversation. He appeared to be one of the most robust members of the community, but walked with a reeling waddle, which disappeared – so I discovered – at a distance of a mile or so from the *ashram*. To do justice to the *ashram* community, I should add that many appeared quite unimpressed. I was even informed by one sceptic that during the delirium which followed his fast this man continually asked for food and added, 'But don't let

Mahatmaji know.' An examination of my own unconscious mind would have revealed a chronic craving for coffee and nicotine. But then, I was not a holy man, and my plain living had little to do with high thinking.

Another curious specimen was the man who lived on 'unfired food'. Gandhi had experimented unsuccessfully not long since with a diet consisting exclusively of uncooked food of vegetable origin; many had imitated him, they had made themselves ill and abandoned the experiment – which was reasonable enough, as the object was intended to be an improvement in health. This man, however, had thrived on the diet, but nothing was further from his mind than bodily health – or so he maintained. His object was the 'realisation of God' through the suppression of desire. One day I heard this very holy man engaged in a loud and angry argument (a thing uncommon at Sabarmati) in which he was maintaining that, as he ate no cooked food, he should not be expected to put in the hour's work for the kitchen which had been allocated to him among his responsibilities.

I learnt to spin – never very well – tried my hand at ginning, carding and weaving (recalling ironically 'the winding sheet of Edward's race'), worked in the fields every morning, and began to learn Sanskrit and Hindi. I talked a great deal, finding my companions very eager to discuss every imaginable subject, but always – as I felt – a little heavily. When anything really amused me I had to put it into a letter or into my journals; for not until Gandhi arrived did I find anyone with whom I could really share the lighter side of life. (His sense of humour was to be one of my most welcome discoveries.[1]) The *ashramites* talked of him incessantly, quoting his words on every subject under discussion. And nearly always they spoke of him as 'Bapu' or 'Bapuji'. 'Bapu' has been rendered as 'Father', but I think 'Dad' expresses it more nearly. It is a familiar and affectionate title. The 'ji' at the end is the usual suffix implying respect, like our 'Mr'. And meanwhile 'Mr Daddy' wrote me letters in his own hand, on the coarse hand-made paper which he always used when it was available.

[1] It could be devastating. Verrier Elwin, whom the reader will meet in due course, once came to see Bapu when he was staying with a high-caste Indian lady. For caste reasons she did not wish to give Elwin hospitality, but would not admit the real reason, which Gandhi immediately recognised. She said she had no spare room. Gandhiji said the verandah would do. But what about his bath, asked the lady. 'He doesn't bath,' said Bapu, beginning to enjoy himself. 'And the toilet . . . ?' The reply was shattering: 'Oh, Verrier sublimates everything.'

The first of these letters was concerned mainly with my health and gave advice as to food. Gandhi also wanted me to 'get the meaning of the verses and hymns sung at prayer time', and to write to him regularly each week until his return to Sabarmati, giving him freely my impressions of life there. His advice as to the verses and hymns I evidently followed to the best of my ability, for I have an old exercise book in which large chunks of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other poems are written with their English translations as expounded by the man who was teaching me Sanskrit. Most of this instruction I have long forgotten, but a line here and there remains in my mind.

Once, for example, on my recent visit, I met a learned *pandit* from Benares – he was introduced to me on a mountain as a great Sanskrit scholar, and when I was on my way down I overtook him. Wishing to be friendly, but hampered by the difficulties of language, I suddenly recalled a little of what I learned at Sabarmati and chanted a line of the *Gita:*

Visaya vinivartante, niraharasya dehinah . . .

They were chosen at random, and must have sounded strange from an Englishman who knew only a few words of Hindustani. (The rough meaning is that material objects cease to concern a man who does not take food.) But the old *pandit* was delighted and instantly capped my lines with the next two (which explain that, after the realisation of God, the desire of such a man for sexual gratification is annihilated). It was a strange conversation between two strangers on a mountain.

The great festival of Devali came while I was still awaiting Gandhi's arrival at the *ashram*. Even at Sabarmati, where there was a puritanical devotion to work and mistrust of leisure, two days' holiday celebrated this occasion – the Hindu New Year, honoured by illuminations and loud explosions such as England reserves for the commemoration of Guy Fawkes, at about the same time.

I was taken into Ahmedabad to see the celebrations there, and visited some world-famous mosques. After I had admired the minarets and innumerable columns of carefully chiselled stone (all cut in most intricate patterns and deliberately constructed to give as much echo as possible) I explored the magnificent ruins of the old walled city – it contrasted strangely with the factory chimneys and the dirty cinema we passed in the modern town. My journals then refer to my first experience of notoriety – and of untouchability:

White 'khadi' is rather conspicuous on anyone, but when an Englishman wears a *dhoti* of this material he must be prepared to be stared at by everyone in the street. However, my friends at the *ashram* implored me to do so, because it would be such an excellent advertisement for the *khadi* movement. So I entered Ahmedabad in full Oriental dress, hand-spun and hand-woven, to put to shame those unpatriotic citizens who clothed themselves in mill-cloth and even in Western style.

Of course, everywhere we went we collected a crowd. It was worst outside a Hindu temple where the religious celebrations were going on. There I had the experience of being refused admission: no reason was given, but I gather that Europeans are technically 'Untouchables' because of their deficiency in personal hygiene.

I was too reticent in those days to specify in what this deficiency consisted. For the benefit of those who do not know, I should explain that a caste Hindu, if he keeps all the rules, bathes every day in running water, cleans his teeth after every meal, uses water for a purpose which is served in a European toilet by paper, always washes his hands after such occasions, and removes his shoes or sandals (with the dirt of the road) before entering a living room or a kitchen – especially a kitchen. His objection to European conceptions of hygiene are (1) that Christian teaching is silent on these essential matters, which a good Hindu considers a monstrous omission, because hygiene (or his conception of hygiene) is an inseparable part of his religion; (2) that he cannot believe that people who do not make hygiene a matter of religious instruction can possibly take it seriously or be trusted to behave fastidiously enough; (3) that Europeans have the disgusting habit of sitting in their own dirty bath water instead of pouring water over themselves; (4) that few Europeans clean their teeth after eating; (5) that they use paper . . . ('Can paper cleanse?' I was once asked in a horrified voice); (6) that hand-washing is left to individual taste, and cannot be relied upon; and (7) that we defile our houses with the filth on our shoes.

There are probably many other points – I mention only those that occur to my mind, recalling many conversations on this interesting topic. So much has been said and written by Europeans – much of it with good reason – in criticism of the personal habits of Indians, that it is just as well to remember the case as a good Hindu sees it. He even eats with his hand (his *right* hand – the left being used for a truly sinister purpose, and strictly *taboo* at the table) because, as he very

reasonably remarks, you can be sure of your hand being clean, but who cleaned the spoon? However, it is time I returned to my own experience of being treated as an Untouchable. My friends were indignant about this refusal of temple entry. They talked solemnly of reporting the matter to Gandhiji as a case meriting immediate attention – a case almost on his own doorstep at that. Whether they said anything or not, it is evident that I mentioned the matter myself as an amusing incident in one of my letters – it seemed to me rather appropriate that Hindus should get their own back for British superiority, and I did not mind personally that I happened to be the supposed victim on this occasion.

Gandhi's reply was typical. He mistook my ironical amusement for charity, gave me full marks for that, but added that 'the hideous truth is that this bar is a variety of the curse of untouchability'. He must have been concerned by the multiplicity of my interests, for in this letter he warned me against being 'greedy about doing many things at once'. He wanted me to 'do some things at least well'. This referred to things taught at the *ashram*.

One day at Sabarmati very much resembled any other, and I fell in with the monastic simplicity – even the monotony – of the life more easily than I should have expected to do. We rose at 4 a.m., roused by a quite intolerable and insistent bell, and hurried to the prayer ground with hurricane lamps. I remember that a poem of Tagore's, chanted on the second day of Devali, was the first thing I heard there which appealed to my Western ear. Every day they sang the hymn already quoted – in which Krishna describes the ideal man, 'the man with the balanced mind', who appeared to me very bland and imperturbable, and not at all to my liking. But there was something that fascinated me about those gatherings of white-robed figures under the stars, especially the brief silence which was part of the ritual.

From 5 to 6 o'clock one bathed and dressed, and I either washed my clothes in the approved Indian manner by bashing them good and hard with a lump of wood, or I would do some other personal chores such as cleaning my room. The room was a square stone cell, with two shelves and two built-in cupboards. There was also a rough bedstead (an unexpected luxury), and on my arrival the only chair in the *ashram* had been put at my disposal. But I soon managed to be rid of it. I gave up shaving at Sabarmati – there seemed to be no time for it – and began to grow a very ineffective beard.

At 6 o'clock the common chores began, and in my early days I joined the squad which cut up vegetables for the kitchen. This was considered a privilege, as Gandhi himself chose this work when he was at the *ashram*, and one could talk to him at the job. Breakfast consisted of milk or *rab* (a kind of wheaten porridge) with a piece of dry toast. Then at 7 o'clock another bell sounded, announcing the beginning of the day's serious work. For me this meant the land. I would work outdoors for about three and a half hours, breaking the hard earth with an instrument that is swung downwards, like a pick, but with an adze at the end of it – something like a mattock without the chisel edge.

At 10.50 we had our midday meal – rice, *chapatis* (unleavened bread), boiled vegetables, *dahl* (pulse) and *ghee* (oil made from butter). Sometimes there would be milk, curds or fruit. No spices were used. We worked on from noon till 4.30 and in my case this meant the technical school, with sometimes a break for lessons in Sanskrit and Hindustani, or a lecture on the *khadi* movement. This last would be partly an exposition of the theory behind the effort to build up the cotton industry again, as a decentralised village craft, and partly a course of instruction in practical methods.

At 4.30 I would go swimming, accompanied by most of the children. There was a good diving pool until the waters subsided. The evening meal, similar to that at midday, was at 5.40. For meals we sat on the stone floor of a long building, facing each other in two long rows, the servers walking up and down with large bowls of food and jugs of water. We used only bronze *talis* (trays) and vessels of bronze, each person cleaning his own utensils by the simple and effective Indian method of rubbing them with earth and rinsing with water. One evening there was an unusual number of people at the place where this cleaning was done, and some of us took our things down to the river. Great fish, called *malchri*, about two feet long, came and snapped up morsels of food almost out of our hands. They seemed to be quite 'tame'.[1]

The time from 6.20 until 7 p.m. I tried to keep apart for studying Hindi; but the demands of my journal and correspondence gradually made this impossible, and cut into every minute of available time. At 7 o'clock there were prayers again, and any general announce-

1 Perhaps because there was no fishing. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) was so strictly observed that when we caught venomous snakes, as we did on several occasions, they were gently deposited in a neighbouring *nullah*.

ments relating to the life and work of the *ashram*. Soon after 8 one went to bed – with prayers again at 4 a.m. it seemed only reasonable.

As I shall have more to say later about decentralised industry I will not discuss at this point one of the main functions of the *ashram*, which was the training of young men and women for work in the villages, principally in connection with the revival of *khadi* or *khaddar* (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth). The life at Sabarmati, it will be observed, was highly disciplined – if you could not stand up to it you would not be of much use in the village work, either for the constructive programme or for leading a civil disobedience campaign.

In a country where time matters, if possible, even less than it does in Ireland ('There's time enough') or in Spain ('*Mañana*') it was astonishing how rigidly Gandhi managed to rule Sabarmati by the clock. In this he openly admired Western practice, and never minded being called a slave to his watch – the big, ugly timepiece that he was always consulting. I was warned by many, before I ever met him, that appointments with the Old Man must be kept to the minute – he would take no excuse for unpunctuality, kept nobody waiting himself and would not be kept waiting. The late-comer would find he had missed his chance. In this matter and many others I already felt I knew Gandhi before I ever met him – but most of all I felt that the place and its routine reflected his mind. To know Sabarmati in those days was – in a great measure – to know its founder and spiritual head.

Another extract from my journals describes the people of the *ashram* under four heads, with some indication of the functions fulfilled by this place:

> The community may be roughly divided into four classes. First there are the members of the *ashram*, including its permanent staff, all under certain vows which include celibacy and poverty. They constitute something like a monastic order, comparable to that of St Francis in many respects, and their membership continues for life, whether they continue to reside here or not.
>
> Next, there are the students. They are mostly young men (though there are also older men, and women) and mostly educated, but they come from every part of India and from every class, including both Brahmins and 'Untouchables'. During the time that they spend here (about eighteen months) they learn the whole science of spinning and weaving, including cleaning, ginning, carding and sizing. They study everything connected with

these arts, from the construction of the tools and machines used in different parts of the country to the economics of the *Khaddar* Movement. Then they go out to their own districts to work in the distributing and selling centres, or perhaps to create such centres. By means of these centres, cotton is supplied to the spinners and yarn to the weavers, and the products sold again without a middleman's profits; and advice is given to the villagers for the improvement of their apparatus.

The third class is that of the children who come here to Gandhiji's model school, where education of a national and religious character is provided. It is one of the Mahatma's serious charges against the Government that their system of education is an attempt to anglicise the nation, and this same charge is brought against many of the mission schools. The English language and literature have ousted Hindi and Sanskrit in these schools, and the teaching of History is said to be a piece of systematic political propaganda. A number of young fellows here have given me their personal experience of this system, and I was specially amazed at what was told me of the mission schools. For instance, the wearing of *khadi* is either discouraged or prohibited in most of the Government colleges, which is quite understandable when one considers that the *khadi* movement is avowedly directed against British trade; but the mission schools, which are not directly involved in this struggle, take up the same attitude in many cases. However, they are often dependent on Government grants.

After which digression I return to the fourth class of ashramites – the guests (such as myself) who come for a short or indefinite period at the invitation of Gandhiji. We live in a bungalow building close by the river, but work and take our meals with the members and students. Some are doing special research or political work, but everyone here accepts the discipline of the *ashram*, and puts in at least a portion of his time with the *charkha* (spinning-wheel).

It was towards the end of November that Gandhi returned to Sabarmati. In the dim light one evening I saw him, and heard his voice for the first time at prayers the following morning. Soon we must meet, but he was a very busy man and I was quite prepared to wait my turn. It came unexpectedly, as I was working that day in the weaving shed – trying to make a carpet and realising how much more difficult it is than one would expect it to be.

Then somebody behind me laughed and I turned round. 'Well, stranger,' he said.

CHAPTER TWO

His fools in vesture strange
God sent to range
The World, and said: 'Declare
Untimely wisdom; bear
Harsh witness and prepare
The paths of change.'

W. G. HOLE

ALMOST THE first thing that Gandhi said to me, after I returned his greeting, was by way of a question – a clinical question which doctors and nurses ask by way of routine, but not the sort of question generally asked by a host in this country when greeting a guest.

India is a country, however, where a great deal of prudery in behaviour – as we should regard it – is found side by side with very outspoken conversation. If you are really concerned with your guest's health, what is more reasonable than to enquire from him as to the state of his bowels? Gandhi has often been called a Puritan, and so he was in many respects. But his puritanism had more in common with that of Stubbes and the straight-from-the-shoulder stuff of our sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than it had with the coy, evasive, mincing British puritanism of the last hundred years. Many things were *taboo* at Sabarmati, but there was no *taboo* on discussing them, or on the discussion of any subject whatsoever.

So we began with a very detailed discussion of my state of health, which was followed by some excellent advice from the old man – he had not experimented on his own body for a lifetime without learning a great deal about health, and particularly about food. As a memory to treasure – and, after all, one's first meeting with a man like Gandhi is a great event – this discourse was hardly what I would have chosen in those days. But today I am glad that it was so true to type. For I never knew a man who set out more deliberately *not to impress people*. He could never 'put on an act'; but when something spectacular seemed to be expected he would produce what looked to me like a calculated anticlimax. (The great Quaker saint, John Woolman, had this in common with Gandhi; and indeed he shared

many other characteristics with the Mahatma.) Months later, when Gandhi was arrested in 1930, the whole business was beautifully staged by the Government – they cut off all telegraphic communication for a whole night and surrounded Gandhi's camp with armed police. Then the officials who were to make the arrest entered the camp and woke their man from his sleep. One of those who were present told me that Bapu was given a few minutes for anything he might want to do or say – an admirable opportunity for a dramatic farewell to his companions, which nobody but a really great man could have resisted. I understand that all he said was: 'Thank you very much; I think I'll clean my teeth.'

From the first I liked this dear old man, with his bald pate (except for the 'sacred tuft' it was close-shaven wherever the hair still presumed to grow). He wore spectacles over his pointed nose, and his birdlike mouth was as full of laughter and kindness as it was empty of teeth – for he considered it vanity to wear his false teeth except when eating. I call him old, though he was then only sixty, because he *looked* so old, even in those days. And yet he had more vitality than anyone I ever knew. But it took me a long time to understand a little about the quality in Gandhi which gave him such enormous power in India. I saw him at first as a kindly, practical, sensible, unemotional person, of devastating sincerity; but I knew there must be more than that about him and hoped that time would disclose the rest.

Two of his notes to me, written at Sabarmati, are of some interest because they demonstrate further that practical and personal attention to detail which was so astonishing in a man with really weighty matters on his mind. Once a week Bapu would have a 'Silence Day', when he would not speak to anybody. The reason was simple enough – there was absolutely no privacy in his life, and a day of complete silence offered the only chance to deal with articles and correspondence. Each of the notes to which I refer was written on a Silence Day.

The first was concerned with the welfare and comfort of two American guests who were coming to Sabarmati for a day or two. The note expressed anxiety that 'they should have the necessary creature comforts supplied to them so long as it is in our power to do so'. I was asked to act as 'co-host' with an Indian member of the community 'and see that they do not feel strangers in a strange land'. Only those who know the pressure of work under which such notes

were written will ever appreciate their full value. There was at that time a first-class political crisis, with political leaders continually arriving at the *ashram* for consultations. Gandhi was, of course, giving this matter his closest attention. He was also editing *Young India* and writing most of the articles in it, dealing with his vast correspondence, personally superintending the work of the All-India Spinners' Association and concerned with the administration of the *ashram*. At one time, I remember, he was also acting as the spokesman of the Ahmedabad millworkers in a dispute with the employers. He was frequently asked to arbitrate himself in many personal and political disputes, and I know not what else besides. Add to this the fact that he never missed his morning walk (when few could keep pace with him) or his daily hour at the spinning-wheel or the morning and evening prayers – it was certainly an achievement that he was never too busy to be the perfect host, and that he had time for the troubles of every child at the *ashram*.

The other Silence Day letter is even more remarkable, for the same reason. The old man had passed me as he came from his bath, and noticed that my nose was bleeding. The few lines he wrote and sent to me five minutes later were by way of advice as to what I should do about it.

I have said that he never had any privacy. Few people can ever have had a really private interview with Gandhi. I noticed with surprise that when he first gave me half an hour to discuss my plans with him, four other people were in the room at the time of my arrival and many others immediately crowded round the open doors. But it was when I set out for Wardha with the Gandhi *ménage* that I really saw the full extent to which he was positively persecuted by the adoration and curiosity of the people.

The old *ashram* at Wardha, in the Central Provinces, was our destination – not Sevagram, which lies outside the town of Wardha and was built many years later, but a place similar in its régime to Sabarmati, differing from it (in my view) chiefly in the absence of a river and the fact that life there seemed to me rather more bleak. (Among other things, I recall that they used a really horrible vegetable oil in place of *ghee*.) We travelled to Wardha third class – *ça va sans dire* – and Gandhiji, from the moment we left Ahmedabad station, struggled with correspondence in spite of the usual overcrowding (fortunately not so bad in those days as it has become since). Indeed, he even began writing before the train left Ahmedabad

station, in spite of the crowd which had assembled on the platform. In Ahmedabad he was seen frequently, and evidently felt no duty to speak on this occasion. The jolting of the abominable rolling stock did not disturb him any more than did the admirers at Ahmedabad. It was when we stopped at later stations that the difficulties began.

Everywhere that we halted, vast crowds were waiting on the platforms. People struggled to get near Gandhi and present their hanks of hand-spun cotton – an innovation which had replaced, in his case, the usual garlands of flowers with which visitors in India are often honoured. Money would be brought for the All-India Spinners' Association, and at most places the Mahatma spoke to the crowds – very soberly, concerned that their volatile enthusiasm should be canalised in practical forms of expression. (How they even knew he was on the train was a mystery – the journey had not been previously announced in the press, and yet the crowds included peasants who had walked up to twenty miles to the nearest station – people who, in any case, were unlikely to read newspapers and certainly did not own radio sets.)

The line of attack on such occasions was generally very much the same, as explained to me by other members of the party. He would discuss the curse of untouchability, the need for Hindu-Moslem unity and brotherhood, the *khaddar* movement and rehabilitation of village industries, the equal place of women, along with men, in the national renaissance, and the campaign against drink and drugs (such as opium). Sometimes he would hold up his hand when talking of this five-point programme, and ask an audience of peasants to do the same, so that they might remember each point, finger by finger. And then he would say that the wrist stood for non-violence – the source and life of all the points he had enumerated. The five points were, of course, merely the first steps in the Constructive Programme.

In the *Taluka* of Bardoli the crowds were doubled. Here a recent no-tax campaign had forced the Government, after a prolonged struggle, to appoint a commission of investigation. (The campaign had been led by Vallabhbhai Patel, until his death the 'strong man' of the present Indian Government.) As the report of the Commission had vindicated almost all the claims of the peasants, the prestige of the All-India National Congress stood exceptionally high in this part of the country; but one also noticed the superior discipline of people who had faced imprisonment, confiscation of property and police brutality without giving way. The crowds here were well

organised, seated (instead of struggling to get near our carriage) in closely packed rows.

Writing and speaking went on alternately. But the little man *did* know how to rest. He was better able to do so than most people, when he wanted to, for he shared with Napoleon the gift of being able to snatch a few minutes' sleep in almost any position or circumstances, at a moment's notice. Once, when Gandhi was attending the Round Table Conference in London, in 1931, a friend of mine (who was anxious about the hours the old man was keeping) asked anxiously if he had managed to get any rest that day. 'Yes,' said Bapu, 'when X—— began his speech I knew what the rest of it would be, so I had half an hour's delicious sleep. Then I woke up just before he had finished and answered him.' On the train to Wardha he took some sleep in short doses – some during the day, which was wise enough considering what followed during the night (the whole journey was about a twenty-four hour stretch). He slept – characteristically – with his spectacles still firmly planted over those curious ears (they stuck out at right-angles, like those of elves in the illustrations to a fairy story). It made me think of paladins who slept in their armour.

His day when travelling was obstinately modelled on his normal routine. For example, he did his hour's spinning – making a pleasant pause for conversation – on his collapsible wheel. In the evening prayers were chanted, which blended with the rumbling of the train. But when night came and we were all doing our best to sleep in considerable discomfort, it was not long before the shout we had heard at every station since Ahmedabad jolted the dozing party into full consciousness. 'Mahatma Gandhijiki *jai!*' It was the old battle-cry of the crowds – 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi'.

Most of the night we passed between uneasy sleep (Gandhi alone seeming to sleep peacefully) and such sudden awakenings. I remarked at one point: 'They don't show you much mercy,' and the old man replied with a chuckle: 'Yes, the quality of their mercy is a little strained.' It was a wonder that there were no accidents. As we left each station the people would hang on to the train, riding till the last moment on the footboards. Railway officials shouted at them and hit them, but all in vain.

It comes back to this again – that Gandhiji *had no private life*, as we Westerners understand the expression. It was not that he sought publicity. But few Indians whom I have known would make the

distinction as sharply as we do in the West between their private and public lives. In England the Prime Minister, the Archbishop and the Public Executioner leave their various rôles behind them when they enter their homes. Except for an occasional inspired article in which a public man is photographed kissing his child (to demonstrate that he really is human) he lives in complete *purdah* so far as the press and the public are concerned. He can relax. He can even be himself without danger of discovery. But the Hindu's house is not his castle; and only the most westernised Indians try to live the double life which we Westerners find so necessary to our peace of mind. In Gandhi's case two other facts have to be taken into consideration: that the people never let him alone, and that he himself hated all concealment. His autobiography was even more ruthless than that of Rousseau in its self-exposure. If the private life of a public man cannot bear scrutiny there must be something wrong with it – so, I think, he would have argued.

Today, as I look back at the things I recall most vividly about Gandhi, I find myself impatient of those pygmy minds which have so often employed themselves in finding flaws and inconsistencies in his life. The greatness of the man and the circumstances in which he lived subjected him to a scrutiny from which most of us are mercifully preserved, not merely because so little of our lives is really known, but because even less is worth anybody's attention. With Bapu I soon realised that nothing he did was unobserved, and very little that was observed was unrecorded. Can we wonder if we find imperfection when every momentary weakness or forgetfulness is faithfully placed upon record? Yet before the searchlight of history and the microscope of biography this man stood unafraid, asking no mercy, exposing every weakness in himself to pitiless publicity. Not only so – for, in addition to the truth, he had to face a truly phenomenal barrage of misquotation, misrepresentation and plain, downright lying, which he made little attempt to contradict, because it was sufficiently extensive to have kept a large secretarial staff in full employment. That is a simple, factual statement. There can scarcely have been another man living who could have stood up to all this and survived the ridicule of mankind. Gandhi had more of that than any man in our time. And then the laughter died suddenly, with three shots from a revolver at Delhi, and we were all ashamed. . . .

Even in 1929, when the rest of us could not imagine such a thing

to be possible, Gandhiji knew the real danger towards which he was heading. An attempt was made by terrorists to blow up the Viceroy's train, and the matter was naturally much discussed at the time. In my journals it is recorded that Bapu laughed and said, 'I shall be the next one.' Then he added: 'Congress use me as their tool, and I am a willing tool; but the day will come when I shall say "No" and our ways will part. I have told them this and they all know it.' It was strange to read of this forgotten conversation on my way to India in 1949, knowing the tragic truth of both those prophecies.

At Wardha I met a man who greatly impressed me. 'He has a pale, sensitive face,' I wrote. 'He is certainly the most "distinguished" looking man I have met in India. . . . Somehow I feel convinced that he will make history.' It was not a bad guess, for this was Jawaharlal Nehru. At Sabarmati I had already seen 'Mr Jinnah, one of the Moslem leaders,' who had arrived (wearing very smart European clothes) to see Gandhiji. But it was not until I went with Gandhi to Lahore, at Christmas, that I met almost the whole group of political leaders which today governs India. For it was there that they held the historic gathering of Congress, when the Independence Resolution was carried, under the presidency of Jawaharlal.

Before we left for Lahore I had my first experience of Indian village life, staying with a Mahratha *Deshmuk* (chieftain) in a village about twenty miles from Wardha – a distance mostly covered by bullock cart, so far as I remember. I certainly remember the bullock cart and the road – the one being without any springs and the other full of gigantic potholes. And I remember it most clearly on the return journey, because I had gorged myself with buffalo *dahee* – curds made from buffalo milk, which is very much richer than that of the cow, and was very injudicious fare for a person who had long lived on plain *ashram* food. It is easy enough to feel seasick on a bullock cart without such provocation. In that village in the Central Provinces I saw for the first time some of the actual problems with which Gandhi and his followers were struggling – the lack of sanitation, the waste of cow dung as fuel, the use of silver ornaments by ragged and half-starved women. As always, I marvelled at the kindness and hospitality extended to me at a moment when political feeling against British rule was reaching a climax. The village band came to my host's house to entertain me with strange sounds – they were all 'Untouchables' but not inaudibles.

We travelled to Lahore via Delhi, the journey being much like the

previous one, so far as the routine was concerned. I have no wish to recall the tedious details of the political negotiations which had then been in progress for some time between the Viceroy (Lord Irwin) and Congress; but they were of interest at the time and Bapu's interview with Irwin on December 23rd was of some importance as a last effort to obtain agreement before the Congress met on Christmas Day. It seems odd now to realise that on that day a Labour Government,[1] through the Viceroy, turned down the last chance of keeping India as a 'Dominion'. Personally, I don't want any 'Dominions' (or colonies); but the amusing thing is that the Labour Party was – and still remains – very keen about the Empire or Commonwealth or whatever they call it. Congress had been saying quite plainly that unless India was given Dominion status within the year it would go all out for Independence. That was the compromise made between the cautious politicians of the old school and the younger men, who couldn't for the life of them see why India should be anybody's 'Dominion'.

And the odd thing is – as one sees when one looks at the old cuttings – that almost everybody in Britain, including all but a handful of Labour M.P's, regarded this demand for Dominion status as an impudent piece of bluff. Winston Churchill, then enjoying the irresponsible position of a *franc-tireur* in the Opposition, even objected to the Viceroy so much as negotiating with Gandhi. Who would have thought then that a few years later Churchill himself would send Cripps to India to offer the 'half-naked fakir' three-quarters of what he had been asking in 1929, with the promise of the rest after the war?

And who, in the England of 1929, would have imagined that such an offer would actually have been refused as a 'post-dated cheque' or that Churchill's successors would have had to carry his policy to its logical conclusion when Churchill himself was once more at liberty to talk nonsense?

In 1929 the Labour Government stood firmly on the necessity for British rule, mitigated in form (but not in fact) by legislatures which reflected little beyond the 'safe' propertied interests. And even these legislative bodies were so hedged round by powers of veto and over-riding powers in the hands of the Viceroy and Provincial Governors

[1] My own disillusionment, at this time, with regard to the Labour Party, was a slow process. Right up to this time I had been making excuses for it; and looking back I marvel (like Clive) at my own moderation.

that they were worse than useless. This was the general pattern of the Indian Constitution in 1929, and it remained the general pattern after all the palaver of the Round Table Conference and the granting of a new constitution to India – on the old model. It was not until Hitler adopted the same model for his puppet government of Czecho-slovakia (which corresponded point for point with the last constitution which Britain gave to India) that such a system was recognised with loud indignation in the British press as a sham and a farce. But even then Hitler was given credit which he did not deserve – they talked about the set-up as though he had invented it.

This digression is necessary in order to give even the briefest account of the events at Delhi and Lahore. Irwin persuaded himself up to the last minute that a little more tinkering with the ridiculous constitution would pass for 'Dominion Status', and was genuinely surprised when the Congress leaders stood firm. With Gandhi, to that interview with the Viceroy on December 23rd, 1929, there went Motilal Nehru – still well remembered in India, but probably best introduced to the English reader as Jawaharlal's father. There were also three others: V. J. Patel, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (the 'Liberal' leader) and Mr Jinnah. V. J. Patel, then President of the Legislative Assembly, was the older brother of Vallabhbhai, the latter having only recently come to the fore in Congress circles. They were all supposed to be united by an all-parties agreement as to the terms on which they would participate in a round table conference with the British, but Sapru and Jinnah soon weakened. That night we left Delhi for Lahore. It was clear that Congress was going to face a major decision.

Before leaving Delhi I had my first skirmish with the press. An Indian representative of Reuters, very smartly dressed (European style), having failed to obtain an interview with Gandhiji, tried to pump me for information. 'I live,' he said, 'on the crumbs that fall from the Rich Man's table.' I observed that he appeared rather to snatch them from the plate. Failing to snatch any crumbs from me he drew me into a discussion of *khaddar*, remarking complacently: 'I toil not, neither do I spin.' But once more his quotation from the Gospels was unfortunate. As I looked at his smartly cut suit I could not resist completing the saying, to the delight of my *khaddar*-clad Indian friends.

People who have never been in India always seem to think that it is hot everywhere all the time. Lahore is, of course, no longer part of

India, but there are places still in the Indian Union which can give one an even harsher experience in mid-winter. We arrived to find mud, slush, rain, a biting wind and frost every night. Worst of all, arrangements for the vast Congress camp were not complete – everything appeared to be in a state of confusion, and one could only stamp about in the rain, trying to generate a little heat whilst waiting for the soggy hospitality of a tent to be made available. Indian friends remarked cheerfully that I must be used to this sort of weather, and I thought of well-warmed English homes and Yule logs (for it was Christmas Eve). 'Yes,' I would say, 'but if anyone went camping in this sort of weather, where I come from, he'd be considered mad.'

One of the odd things about Indians, which I confirmed on my recent visit, is their capacity for enduring cold. It is natural enough that they should endure heat more readily than we do – though I have sometimes found that I could actually stand more of it than some of my Indian friends. But in cold weather many of them will add no more than a cotton shawl to their scanty clothing – and this does not apply only to those who are too poor to buy more clothes. Some of my companions at Lahore slept under a single cotton sheet and maintained that they were warm – they certainly slept peacefully enough, as I knew; for, in spite of several woollen blankets, I slept very little on account of the cold. To sleep as they did, under canvas, with frost outside, is something which takes some explaining. I believe Indians bottle up sunshine in their skins and create some sort of reserve supply.

The camp was known as the *Lajpat Rai Nagar*, named after Lala Lajpat Rai, the last of the great 'Moderates' who had been done to death by the police while trying to pacify a mob. The tents were pitched on low ground by the bank of the River Ravi, and were completely waterlogged until the rain mercifully stopped after the first day. Gradually some kind of order emerged from the chaos, in spite of a good deal of 'Thermopylism' (Huxley's word, derived from Edward Lear's Old Man of Thermopylae). Things happened that should have helped me to see into the future. It is easy, of course, to be wise after the event; but when I recall the behaviour of the Congress 'volunteers' on the first day I realise the sort of thing Gandhi had in mind when he foresaw the parting of the ways between Congress and himself. 'Nobody,' I wrote at Lahore, 'seemed to know where anything or anybody could be found; and the "National Volunteers", who are here especially to assist people in

such matters, spent all their time forming fours and marching out of step.' Later these volunteers policed the camp somewhat officiously. Our section of the camp still kept *ashram* hours, with prayers at 4 a.m.; and one morning I was – in a manner of speaking – 'arrested' by the volunteers on my return from a walk, before dawn. They thought that I was an undesirable character trying to enter the leaders' enclosure. Opinion varied as to who I was, anyway; some said a Communist from Russia and others a C.I.D. spy.

It was a strange Christmas, but after all – as I noted at the time – 'Bethelehem is more suggestive of tents than of turkeys.' I had my Christmas dinner with a Moslem, Dr Syed Mahmoud, who was for some time Joint Secretary of Congress. I became very friendly with this man, and in his tent, where I spent a good deal of my time in the evenings, I frequently met Jawaharlal Nehru who was an old friend of Mahmoud (they had been at Cambridge together). 'Of Jawaharlal,' I wrote, 'I have the highest opinion. . . . But the rank and file of Congress are mostly poor stuff. Most of them just come to hear themselves talk . . .'

A great deal of this talk was directed against Gandhi and the Nehrus, the dominant trio of the moment. The British press so assiduously built up the legend of Gandhi the Dictator that even to-day few people in this country realise how often he had only a minority on his side, so far as Congress was concerned. The peasants and villagers would, it is true, have followed him anywhere. It is also true that Congress, powerful as it was, would not have attempted, in his lifetime, to lead any mass movement without being sure of his co-operation – for the simple reason that without Gandhi any mass movement would certainly have failed. But he never abused this privileged position. If he was defeated, and found himself with the minority, he would quietly go on with his work, and the majority generally found by experience, in the course of time, that he had been right. Such a moment had now arrived – for Gandhi had long been opposed to any attempt to work the sham constitution, and now Congress was clearly prepared to embark on full non-co-operation. The close alliance between the two Nehrus and Gandhi ('The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost', to quote an opposition sneer which was publicly uttered at Lahore) gave him the support of the older politicians, represented by Motilal, and that of the younger and more revolutionary elements, of which Jawaharlal was then the acknowledged leader.

The younger Nehru was elected President of Congress that Christmas. He, his father and Gandhi were under heavy fire from two factions. One was a group of Bengalis, 'leftists' of a sort, led by Subhas Chandra Bose – the same Bose who later founded the 'Indian National Army' which was to have liberated India with the dubious assistance of Japan. I now believe that Bose was quite sincere. It is interesting also to see how widely the Bose cult has spread since the war. On my recent visit I noticed that his slogan, *Jai Hind*, was in general use, and that his picture was often placed side by side with that of the Mahatma. In one place I found a seraphic waxwork trinity in which Gandhi presided, with Nehru on one side and 'Netaji' (Bose) on the other. (It reminded me of the three pictures said to have been found in the huts of Ukrainian peasants in the nineteen-twenties – Lenin, Dr Nansen and the Virgin Mary.) Whether Bose would ever have appreciated this juxtaposition with Gandhi and Nehru I very much doubt. I noted him down in 1929 as 'the most thoroughly unpleasant-looking man I have ever seen,' and considered the behaviour of his group ill-mannered and factious – motivated by personal jealousy, to all appearances.

The other opposition group was 'right-wing', consisting mainly of delegates from Marashtra, who favoured further compromises with the Government. What, I think, most disgusted me about the Bose group was that when their own 'left' amendments were defeated they made a complete change of front and voted with these right-wing Mahrathas. But the Gandhi-Nehru combination had its way on all major issues, and the windbags who had given me such a bad impression of the Congress 'rank and file' proved to be no more than a noisy minority.

The Lahore Congress was such an important event in Indian history that it seems absurd to think of Lahore today being part of a country which is not India. Before Congress assembled, *The Times of India*, with evident pleasure, prophesied that it would have a hostile reception, and even hinted at riots; for the Hindus were only about thirty per cent of the population of the Punjab (and every effort was made by the enemies of Congress to label it as a 'Hindu' organisation, in spite of its many Moslem presidents and other Moslems prominently associated with it, in addition to Sikhs, Christians, Parsees and others).

In Congress circles such prophesies were regarded as nonsensical; but even in those days there was a feeling of uneasiness as to the

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religious minorities. 'Communal' (i.e. inter-religious) tension was agreed to be much greater than it had been in 1921. For this the Government was blamed – no doubt on general principles, but also for some perfectly good reasons to which I later devoted a whole chapter of my *White Sahibs in India*. In the case of the Punjab, for example, the Sikhs, who numbered only twelve per cent of the population, had been given thirty per cent of the seats in the Legislature, under the disastrous system of Communal Electorates. Where Moslems were in the minority they had been similarly favoured. A secular party, such as Congress, which aimed at uniting the country, was therefore faced by a clamour from such minorities demanding outrageous concessions (which would have been the negation of democracy) as the price of their support. I have said enough about the nature of the constitution to make it clear that the Government could afford to bid high, because it made no real difference to anybody except those elected by the propertied classes; they obtained jobs, perhaps, and pseudo-kudos, the Government went on governing and the mass of the people were completely unaffected. But the few who stood to gain were persons of wealth and influence. They could too easily persuade many of their co-religionists that something real was at stake.

Yet the historic meeting of Congress at Lahore did not provoke the hostility so agreeably foreseen by *The Times of India*. On the contrary, when I saw the Congress procession pass through the town – headed by Nehru on horseback – I marvelled at the enthusiastic reception it received. Roofs, balconies and streets swarmed with cheering spectators.[1] In those days even Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, rejected the idea of partitioning India – it would have been unthinkable. And, had better counsels prevailed in England at that time, self-government for a united India could have been achieved in spite of all the mischief done by Communal Electorates and other devices, with little if any of the human misery that followed partition – though (as Richard Hooker once so wisely observed) 'Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better.' It took another fifteen years for the seeds of dissension to grow into a Hindu-Moslem tension which split the country in two. India, which might have been a model to Europe as a federal republic

[1] I had always been given to understand that Indians were not given to cheering, and found that this opinion is still held by some, on the grounds that members of the British Royal Family have not been greeted in this way.

of free peoples, has merely imitated the European rage for disintegration.

During the last hours of 1929 the Independence Resolution was debated in the Congress *pandal*, and at midnight the resolution was carried. Nehru hoisted the National Flag and the vast crowd sang *Bande Mataram*. It is a beautiful anthem, even (I think) to many European ears, but has since been set aside in favour of another Bengali song, by Tagore. Noble as the new national anthem undoubtedly is, *Bande Mataram* had a history which added to its value, for it had been proscribed as seditious. For singing it men and women had been imprisoned, crowds had been beaten up by the police, and children thrashed by schoolmasters or by police instructed by magistrates. . . . Now it rang out again as the challenge of a whole nation through its most trusted leaders. All that night there was cheering mingled with shouts of '*Inquilab Zindabad!*' (Long live Revolution!). But punctually at 4 a.m. the Mahatma's camp rose for its morning prayers.

I should be giving a very unbalanced account of that memorable week if I did not refer again to aspects of that Thermopylism which always does its best to wreck any great occasion in Indian life. No sense of the dignity proper to such a gathering could deter the side-shows and the hawkers. Nor did it prevent Congressmen from chattering – as they invariably did and still do – when an important speech was being made, even though the speaker were Gandhi himself. An Indian temple will often present one with the same contrasts – no sense of awe prevents irrelevant vulgarity from intruding. Perhaps this is typically Oriental, in which case it may explain the presence of those money-changers and pedlars of poultry in the Temple at Jerusalem. I am told that Latin people have the same failing, but I don't know whether in their cathedrals the hokey-pokey man and the peanut vendors ply their trade round the High Altar – I should have thought not.[1] In the *Lajpat Rai Nagar* a trade exhibition was not a bad idea in itself – *khaddar* and other *swadeshi* (Indian manufactured) goods had a place in the Congress programme; and with proper handling an appropriate exhibition might have been organised. But among my notes of exhibits is a reference to 'BRAINIO, the great Brain Tonic'. It had enabled Pandit Somebody (of whom a large photograph was displayed) to obtain his B.A.

[1] I am, however, informed that 'conducted tours' of sightseers continue to roam around Notre-Dame during the celebration of Mass.

After the Lahore Congress I left Gandhiji and went touring on my own for a couple of months. During that time I saw a good deal of Northern India. I also, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, discovered how deeply that little man in the loincloth had impressed me. While I was with him I liked, respected and admired him – but I searched in vain for some invisible quality in him that made him the lodestone of men's hearts and souls. It was not until I left him that I found he had added my own to his collection.

CHAPTER THREE

Wild and untaught are terms which we alone
Invent, for fashions differing from our own;
For all their customs are by nature wrought,
But we, by art, unteach what nature taught.

DRYDEN

I HAVE never spent a single night in an Indian hotel, and I find it a matter of some interest, considering that the length of my two visits, taken together, was over a year, and that on each occasion I spent much of my time travelling about the country. The hospitality of the people, even to complete strangers, is a remarkable thing: you have only to know somebody who knows someone else in the town or village to which you are going, and you will be welcomed as though you were an old friend of the family.

After I left Lahore I had a variety of hosts and of experiences. I travelled third class, except on some trains which had no third-class coaches, when I used the 'Inter.' carriages. Always I found some English-speaking Indians and they invariably drew me into political discussions. Sometimes I had, at first, to disarm an automatic hostility, 'but invariably,' I wrote, 'we get on splendidly after the first ten minutes.'

For the first time I now met anglicised Indians – not in the third and 'Inter.' railway carriages, but at places where I stayed. I have since met Indians who have lived long enough in the West to assimilate its culture completely; but this was not the case with those I met there in the United Provinces. 'Hybrid creatures,' I noted, 'aping English externals, the meaning of which is quite beyond them, they seem to me to belong to no nationality or tradition whatever. Some are quite lovable, but all are pitiable.' I saw them as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Macaulay's famous dictum, in his evidence before the Parliamentary Commission of 1853:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.

The quotation was already familiar, and the deplorable result was at last before my eyes. The Indian administrative class I found quite desperately anxious to be anything but Indian. All that European clothes, American jazz, Scotch whisky and cosmopolitan bridge could do for a man had been done. 'The conquest of the land,' as Sir William Hunter had written with grim self-satisfaction, 'was followed by the conquest of the mind.' Certainly the Indian magistrates and administrators whom I met had succeeded in not being themselves. What they had become, God only knew.

It had already been made clear to me that outside their own circle these people were despised by other Indians, who regarded them as slaves in their relationship with the British and petty tyrants in their dealings with their fellow-countrymen. I had also been given many hints on the ship of the fact that the British also held them in contempt; and of this I saw some further evidence. On the whole the British of the old régime preferred an Indian to be an Indian and to have a little self-respect, even if it made him a nuisance. It is curious that not until the second world war did language evolve a name for people of this type. History has produced thousands of Quisling prototypes, including that objectionable woman Rahab, the whore of Jericho, who 'collaborated' (as the saying is) with Joshua's secret service. Her object was, quite simply, to be on the winning side – and as she backed the winner Holy Writ has made quite a heroine out of her. Like the sordid Rahab, I suppose the pre-Quisling collaborators of India were justified by success. What is alarming is the extent to which the present Indian administration still relies upon them. Most of them whom I met were poor things who had not, I suspected, really thought out their position, because they were incapable of doing so. But this did not make their spineless sycophancy any less irritating.

One man – a magistrate – was, I believe, at heart a genuine nationalist. The contradiction between his private views and his public office was apparent to anyone who knew him, but his ingenious dialectics could somehow square the circle to his own satisfaction. One day I asked him what he would do when civil disobedience began. Would he, as a magistrate, imprison people for trying to achieve that *swaraj* in which he himself believed? No, he said, he would rather throw up his job. Some time later, when I had returned to England, I was told that this man had been imprisoning Congress workers who had picketed the liquor shops. This picketing

had a political significance, as the Government derived a good revenue from the trade; but in the case of this particular magistrate the imprisonment must have involved some mental gymnastics – for, apart from his buried nationalism, he was a strict teetotaller. He went on with the Government's work through various periods of civil disobedience and repression; and when self-government came in 1947 he thought – with good reason – that his services would no longer be required. He was described to me as a pitiable figure at that time. But he held his job and was even given promotion. The last I read of him was in connection with an official reception to Pandit Nehru.

I do not know how such men ought rightly to be used. I do know that they are apt to be, if anything, more dangerous than those who never had any twinge of conscience about their position under British rule. Where there existed a stifled political conscience I saw, time after time, that it produced an aggressive and vindictive attitude of mind. They hated with an intense ferocity all who were true to the ideals they had themselves betrayed. I wonder today how much harm is still being done by such people, now that they are working under the orders of the men and women whom they once threw into prison. It is probably easy for a man like Nehru to forgive some nonentity who once sent him to jail – but how much harder is it for the other man to forgive the integrity which he envied, the courage and devotion which shamed him. It assumes a 'change of heart' which is, unfortunately, rare.

One entry in my diary records a visit to a Magistrate's Court, where 'justice' was being dispensed to tattered leavings of humanity, all wretched people who were manifestly terrified of the magistrate (an Indian friend of mine), of the police, and even of myself. Among other cases were the preliminary proceedings against a woman charged with infanticide – a sordid business. Whether from remorse or fear, the woman was very agitated, and I was glad to have my friend's assurance that, even if she were found guilty, she would not be hanged.

Suddenly the case was interrupted. A British officer entered the Court, walked straight up to the Indian magistrate, and began talking about a gun licence. The magistrate said he was not empowered to issue new licences – the officer would have to see the Deputy Commissioner. But the matter did not end there – the officer wanted his gun immediately, and this way it would take some days. Could

not some special arrangement be made on his behalf? The futile argument lasted about ten minutes before the officer withdrew, very annoyed. Outside the Court, later, I asked the magistrate why he did not order this interrupter to remove himself. My friend smiled and shrugged. 'As a matter of fact,' he replied, 'I really ought to have got up and offered him a chair.' I thought this was a joke; but later I heard of two cases which made it clear that it was nothing of the sort. 'What is one to make,' I wrote in my journal, 'of a régime in which an officer's gun licence takes precedence over the majesty of the law and can hold up a whole Court in the hearing of a capital charge?'

In officialdom, as I had already been warned, I found that the *memsahib* of the species was more deadly than the *sahib*. There was a tea party never to be forgotten. The Settlement Commissioner was there and a sour-looking man who (so I was informed) was a judge – both British – with Mrs Commissioner and Mrs Judge. Out of a sudden lull in conversation the voices, the imperious, commanding voices, of those two women woke me from my afternoon stupor.

'Did you hear,' said one, 'that one of their beaters died of sunstroke and two were killed by a tiger? But none of the party was hurt – weren't they lucky?'

'Yes,' replied the other voice, 'but it will make it rather difficult to get beaters there next time, won't it?'

I quote this astonishing conversation from my journals, as I recorded it the same evening. In a work of fiction, as it struck me at the time, the dialogue would probably have been considered far-fetched – malicious caricature. I sat through the rest of the party listening to the Commissioner patronising a *zemindar* and the *zemindar* toadying to the Commissioner, while I suppressed (by the Grace of God) a violent urge to start throwing teacups in all directions.

There was a marked change in the attitude of many – perhaps most – British residents in India during the years that followed. But in 1930 this sort of thing was all too common, and few of the Indians whom I met (other than those who had travelled in the West) would believe that English people as a whole were not of this pattern. 'Then why,' I would ask, 'do you treat me with such kindness?' The answer was always essentially the same. I was supposed to be an exception. It made me think a good deal. After all, I had done nothing for anybody, but was – on the contrary – indebted to countless Indians for all manner of assistance and hospitality. 'In short,' I noted, 'I have accepted everything and given next to nothing; and

the greatest virtue I can claim is that I have been civil and decent and sympathetic. . . . The Indian complaint against us is not that we fall short of the "superman" standard. . . . It is that we lack common civility and courtesy.' It was true enough – but I doubt if I looked at Indians with an equally critical observation. Twenty years later I realised that Indians – especially in relation to their social 'inferiors' – could be quite as offensive as English people.

The peasants of Gujerat, such as I had seen, had appeared to be reasonably healthy and happy. They showed also an independent spirit. I had seen little of the Punjab, yet enough to admire the physique of the people, which could not have been maintained in abject poverty. But in the United Provinces, where I spent most of January, 1930, I found myself in a land of *sahibs* and serfs. It was, in fact, one of the few places where I was myself treated as a *sahib* – during the rest of my time I was more fortunate in the company that I kept. (It is a curious reflection on my two visits to India that I was so seldom addressed as *sahib* on the first occasion, whereas in 1949–50 I could hardly escape from this bogus title.) But in the United Provinces I was the guest of people in authority, which undoubtedly compromised my position. Everywhere I went I noted that wretched, starved-looking villagers 'hastily avoided the path and made way for the English *sahib*, salaaming very low. . . . Poverty drags them down and oppression pushes them from the top. I have lost count of all the stories that I hear continually of the treatment meted out to these poor villagers of the United Provinces. Sometimes it is the *zemindars* who are responsible and sometimes the British or Indian officials. But woe to the peasant who lifts his hand against either!'

But there was at least one happy memory that I took with me from the United Provinces, and that was of the two weeks I spent in the North Kheri Forests with the man who is now Inspector-General of Forests for the whole of India. M. D. Chaturnedi – 'Chats' as all his friends called him – was at that time 'Silviculturist' for the Province, doing special research work, and I was fortunate indeed in making his acquaintance. So was my wife, whom he later met in London; for in the early months of 1949 she had an even more adventurous time in the forests with Chats than I had enjoyed twenty years earlier. For a really lively description of Chats the *shikari*, Chats the 'Person among people', the relevant chapters of Ethel Mannin's *Jungle Journey* cannot be rivalled, and I do not intend to compete.

However, there is just one story which Ethel does not tell about Chats that has some relevance here. When she went to India in '49, about nine months before my second visit, she had been assured by me that my old friend was not interested in hunting and hardly ever carried a gun. Her first letter to me after she had met Chats in the U.P. forests (of which he was then Chief Conservator) contained the surprising comment: 'Your friend who never carries a gun met me with four of them.' He had, in fact, taken to *shikar* in the same way that a man takes to drink, and with the same concentration. The man whom I had known when we were both young was as vivid and overpowering a personality as the tiger hunter described in *Jungle Journey;* but he had not yet taken to tiger hunting.

I was surprised at the long walks he would take me down forest tracks, sometimes turning aside through the dense undergrowth: for even at dusk he seldom carried a gun. Once when I was with him on an evening walk, and he had been explaining that the wild boar was one of the few beasts which attacked without provocation,[1] he suddenly gripped my arm, and we stood very still in the failing light. For many long seconds I could see nothing; and then, one by one, the wild boar crossed the path not far ahead of us. 'That's what I mean,' he said, 'but you can only keep out of their way. What would be the use of a gun? The rest just come on.'

Day after day we would plunge through the jungle on foot or on an elephant, seeing deer and sambur, but no sign of the local tiger, though he made a kill nearby one evening. I was having my bath in the *Dak* Bungalow at which we were staying, and all I remember about it is the staccato cry of the barking deer, which told its own tale of terror until it suddenly stopped. From the other side of the bathroom door Chats gave me a running commentary on the whole drama – not that he could see anything. It was general knowledge plus imagination. I had no more desire than Chats had (in those days) to shoot tigers, and I should have been disgusted at the idea of shooting the beautiful deer and sambur. But I had the strongest irrational desire to shoot a crocodile. I have never really approved of crocodiles, and they are one of the hardest things to shoot, which naturally adds interest if you go in for shooting at all. There is only

[1] 'It is a common saying and belief among the Turks that all the animal kingdom was converted by the Prophet to the true faith, except the wild boar and the buffalo, which remained unbelievers; it is on this account that both these animals are often called Christians.' I cull this pleasantly irrelevant note from Buckhardt's *Travels in Syria.* Alas, I found no echo of the legend in India.

one spot where you can pierce the *mugger's* armour, and he is surprisingly nervous and quick. One moment he is apparently sleeping off a heavy lunch of half-cremated corpses or whatever was on the river menu that day; and then at the slightest sound his huge body shoots into the water and . . . you've had it. He even, I believe, sleeps with one eye open, for many times it was no sound, but only an injudicious movement out of cover, which evidently startled my quarry.

So, at my request, we stalked crocodiles, crossing a river in a leaky dug-out; but I never got my croc. As I had never shot before in my life, this was not surprising (what was surprising was that a *Gandhi-wallah* should have been playing this game at all). Later in my travels, whilst staying in a village with Jaya Prakash Narayan (now the leader of the Socialist Party in India) I went out stalking crocodiles with my host, but had no better luck. The nearest I ever was to one of those monsters, which had such a curious horror-fascination for me, was on an expedition with Chats and some other forest officers. We were in one of the old Tin Lizzies – admirable things for forest work, or on any Indian roads for that matter, with their chassis perched so high from the ground – and, as we turned a bend and swung over a rough bridge, there was the wicked old *mugger* only a few feet below, sunbathing as usual. We had one glimpse of him before the inevitable splash, and he was gone.

That expedition was an interesting one. We were in a *sal* forest, on fairly flat land and typical of the Gangetic Plain. Chats had been telling me of his work, and the difficulty experienced in regenerating *sal*. When the I.F.S. began operations it had few ideas other than those based on Western experience. The forest officers superintended felling, maintained game laws and prevented fires. In this last activity they had been so successful that – in the absence of periodic fires – a thick undergrowth had grown up, spreading a moist carpet of acid mould in which the *sal* seedlings were choked. An occasional fire, it appeared, would have given the young trees a little light and air, with an alkaline mould. *Sal* trees, not being resinous, are apparently not much harmed by a fire in the undergrowth if it takes place at the right time of year.

Another difficulty had arisen from the protection of deer and the destruction of so many tigers, who would normally have kept down the number of deer in the forests. Such young shoots as survived the perils of the undergrowth were commonly browsed upon by the

deer – I was shown many examples. The Research Department for which Chats was working (it had been specially created to deal with the whole problem) had been experimenting in the firing of forest blocks; but the undergrowth had become so extensive that these fires destroyed more than was intended. At the point when I arrived in the North Kheri Forests Chats was planning a trip to the borders of Nepal, where forests were not 'protected' and where – so he told me – they were consequently flourishing. This was the object of the expedition in the Tin Lizzie.

We went with two Englishmen – the Conservator of Research and the local D.F.O. (Divisional Forest Officer). Heavy rain had waterlogged the rough tracks, and only the daring speed of the D.F.O., who was driving, prevented us from being bogged in several places; but we swung merrily from side to side of those abominable tracks, missing tree trunks by inches. At last we stopped on a wide, straight road, with a broad belt of grass on either side. It was the frontier – the border of Nepal.

Almost immediately the three I.F.S. men began talking excitedly, and presently Chats explained to me in non-technical terms what it was all about. On our right was India and on our left Nepal. The forest on the Nepalese side was largely clear of undergrowth – one could see into the jungle for a hundred to two hundred yards. On the other side it was possible to see for no further than ten to twenty yards. The fires on the Nepal side must have swept right up to the border, where the broad clearing had checked them. Trees in Nepal were of varying sizes, but on the Indian side they were mostly of the same size – 'very few of them under forty years of age', as one of the forest officers remarked. That dated the youngest trees from about the tenth year of the era of 'protection', when it must have become effective in rearing the carpet of scrub. The two Englishmen confirmed what Chats had told me: in Nepal, they said, the burnt and sun-dried mould gave a good alkaline topsoil. Tigers were safe from the big-game hunters and kept down the number of deer. They had no Forest Department, but their forests came under the Revenue officials, who ordered felling occasionally. I do not know whether they replanted, or whether that was left to nature. What was clear was that this easy, inefficient way of letting nature do its own job had worked, and that the experts were now learning from it.

Not long after that visit I was interested to read in the *Leader* of Allahabad extracts from a Government Report which said that 'the

burning of regeneration areas is having beneficial effects'. How they managed to control the fires once the undergrowth had reached such dimensions I do not know. The report also mentioned experiments with deer-proof enclosures.

After my adventures in the North Kheri Forests I continued my journey eastwards, staying first with a Sikh friend at Lucknow and then at Gorakhpur with Chats again, before I set off on my own to Chapra. Here I arrived on January 26th, which had been declared 'Independence Day' by the Lahore Congress. It had been celebrated as such throughout the country. Exactly twenty years later I was to see the inauguration of the Indian Republic on January 26th, 1950, the day before I left Bombay on my return home; but in 1930 this would hardly have appeared credible. My host at Chapra was my friend Dr Syed Mahmoud, who had been so kind to me at Lahore. As General Secretary of the Congress Committee and a Provincial leader of Congress, he had been reading the Independence Declaration and hoisting the national flag at a public demonstration. On my arrival he told me he had fully expected to be arrested, and had made all arrangements for my reception at his house in that event. However, I found him in full possession of his liberty and of plans for enlarging it.

This was my first experience of a *purdah* household. The position was paradoxical, for my host was strongly opposed to *purdah;* but his wife had been brought up to regard it as essential to her modesty, and insisted on keeping to this custom – with the result, of course, that I never met her.

It was from Chapra that I crossed the River Sarya to stay with Jaya Prakash, on that occasion the companion of my last crocodile hunt and perhaps his, too – he now hunts capitalists. Jaya Prakash came over the river to fetch me, and we embarked on an astonishing boat which was almost round, with no keel. The Sarya was full of sandbanks and tricky currents, the wind very strong; but the boatman, a wily old Moslem, brought us over safely in about an hour. My companion pointed out a great railway bridge, built on piles across the river. When it was first constructed, he said, it caused such changes in the course of the river that his whole village had been swept away. His home was in the new village, built further up. The stupidity shown so often in the planning of bridges and railway embankments was something to which my attention was often drawn – the forest officers had mentioned it as a cause of floods in

Northern India. Later I was to learn of the damage done by the railway embankment on the line from Calcutta to Madras – it forms a dam across low-lying country at right angles to the principal waterways. (In the opinion of that great expert, Sir William Willcocks, this particular embankment was a major factor contributing to flood and famine in Bihar and Orissa.)

Though I still thought mainly in political terms in those days, I was beginning to feel an interest in such problems as these – leading me in later years to an increasing concern for the conservation of the soil. I realised that the damage done by these bridge and embankments was an example of man's insensitiveness to the demands of nature. The result was immediate profit for a few and temporary convenience for many; but in the long run the result was disaster. Was this simply because a Limited Company has no conscience, or was it partly on account of ignorance? In a specialised civilisation the men who built a railway in India might know little about the needs of the Indian soil – still less did company promoters in London, the *burra sahibs* of Whitehall or the investors at Bath or Bournemouth. I began to see that, apart from politics, remote control and specialisation could lead us into appalling catastrophes, the result of what has since been called 'fragmentation' – seeing things in isolation when they are, in fact, closely related to one another.

The story of the *sal* forests was another pointer. It showed the inadequacy of experience acquired in one part of the world when applied to another, unless one was alert and sensitive to the differences that might exist elsewhere. And one other piece of knowledge had come to me in the forests, in the long talks that I used to have with Chats – knowledge that had startled me, though it was not until 1943 that I really followed it up and worked out some of its implications in the last chapters of my book, *Cleanliness and Godliness.* It was when we were talking one evening by the fire at the *Dak* bungalow that I asked Chats something about the extensive use of cow dung as fuel in many parts of India. In the course of a long talk on the subject he told me of vitamin deficiency in grain grown on soil that was not manured or was treated only with chemicals; and I realised for the first time the direct connection between this deficiency in the soil and deficiency diseases (such as beri-beri). It was then, too, that I first considered the wider application of the Law of Return, wondering how much mineral wealth was being annually removed from the agricultural countries and sent through the sewers of distant

cities into the sea. And what was being lost besides the calculable quantities of minerals? If vitamins had been so recently discovered, what other organic substances, quantitatively minute and as yet unobserved, but perhaps essential to health, might be destroyed by our efficient civilisation?

It was interesting to discover in later years that my own thoughts, following a train of philosophical speculation, were on the very lines which were even then being pursued by scientific workers. When I came to study the matter more closely, I found that Boyd-Orr and others had computed the alarming quantities of minerals removed – for example – from distant pastures by the export of sheep and cattle for the slaughterhouses of Europe. And Sir Robert McCarrison (he was Colonel McCarrison of the I.M.S. when I first heard of his work from Chats[1]), proceeding along lines which converged with the work of Sir Albert Howard, had shown that much more was lost than minerals. What interested me perhaps most was that Howard so often spoke of the elements 'known and unknown' in soil and plant life, confirming my own suspicion that we were approaching our problems from a wrong angle. Having wilfully destroyed the goodness of the soil, we assessed that part of it which we could isolate and understand, and then tried to replace it synthetically. But how did we know that we had not missed something invaluable? You could put the limbs of a dismembered corpse together, for that matter, but there would be something missing – a thing not easily weighed, called Life. Applied to cow dung or to any other organic manure, this method of reasoning meant that you could not be sure you had really found a substitute because you could reproduce the known chemical contents. Even the crudest quack would hardly treat anæmia with doses of iron filings – or, in other words, even if the right substances were made available, were they necessarily capable of being assimilated?

All such speculation pointed to one course only as reliable – that which enabled nature to do its own work with the minimum of interference. But how could that be made possible in a world where whole nations specialised to the extent of turning themselves into gigantic workshops, fed from distant fields and granaries? The Law

[1] It is of some interest that Gandhi's *Young India* was the only non-technical paper which drew attention to McCarrison's revolutionary discoveries at that time. On my recent visit I found 'organic husbandry' well established in all the rural centres founded by Gandhi and his followers.

of Return could not be operated on those terms. *It presupposed decentralised industries and a balanced regional economy.* That was the thought that had begun to revolve in my mind after my discussions with Chats. Absorbed as I was, for many years after, in rather futile political activities, I did not give sufficient attention to the implications of decentralisation; but the thought was always there in the background. The belief, which I hold so strongly today, in the urgent necessity for decentralisation began with the realisation in India that the observance of the Law of Return is inconsistent with an extensive international trade in agricultural products. It is only possible in a society which is self-sufficient enough, on a regional basis, to grow its own food and absorb its own organic 'waste', so that it goes back into circulation.

To a very large extent this problem is bound up with the conflict between present profit and the interests of posterity – between a money economy and a natural economy. I realised that it was analogous to that presented by the railway embankments, and it led me to the same tentative conclusions. It was a problem – had I but known – which had been forecast back in the eighteenth century by the American Quaker, John Woolman, who had a great deal to say about the shortsighted stupidity of those who were even then beginning the destruction of America's virgin soil. 'By sending abroad great quantities of grain and flour,' he had said, 'the fatness of our land is diminished.' This was in order to obtain gold, which Woolman regarded as useless if not pernicious. 'I believe,' he wrote, 'the real use of gold amongst men bears a small proportion to the labour of getting it out of the earth and carrying it about from place to place.' (He never lived to see it dug out of the South African mines in order to be buried again in his own country.) But what is most to the point, as expressing the trend of my own thought, is Woolman's statement that 'if trade extended no further than was consistent with pure wisdom, I believe trade might be carried on without gold'. In considering later the full implications of a natural decentralised economy, I shall return again to this theme; for the study of its practical possibilities was one of the principal objects of my attention on my second visit to India. The most vigorous and original minds in India are, in fact, concerned with making that type of society a reality.

One other thing that arose in my discussions with Chats about the suicidal waste of cow dung as fuel was the lack, in many parts of India, of any alternative. With regard to this, as he later pointed out

in *The Indian Forester* (April, 1930), Chats held that 'the villager . . . is fully aware of the fact that cow dung is more valuable as manure'. But in vast areas there were no trees, and where trees grew felling was generally prohibited by the Government or a landowner. The villager could not afford, as a rule, to buy wood for his fire; and the only way out of this *impasse* was quite obviously the creation of new fuel reserves at the disposal of the peasant and the labourer. Chats himself had begun experimenting in this direction with a few village plantations; and perhaps the most interesting thing that he told me was that in order to obtain full co-operation from the villagers he had revived that ancient institution, the *panchayat*. When I met my old friend again recently, almost my first question was on this point – I wanted to know whether the Inspector-General of Forests, with his great authority throughout India, had found it possible to extend the work which he began as Silviculturist in the U.P. He assured me that much was being done; but as I was (most unfortunately) unable to accompany him on one of his tours I was never able to see for myself. The question of the *panchayats* remains, and is worth a word of explanation – it also takes me, oddly enough, to Calcutta and to the end of this chapter.

The *panchayat* was the ancient village council. It was responsible for the administration of justice, which was carried out – according to Sir Thomas Munro – 'justly, correctly and expeditiously' in comparison with the British system which replaced it; and this Sir Thomas found 'not only most expensive and vexatious, but totally inefficient'. This was written in 1820 by one of the wisest administrators in the days of John Company. The *panchayat* was also responsible for education, and Munro had written in 1813 of 'schools established in every village for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic'. As late as 1830 Sir Charles Metcalfe (afterwards Acting Governor-General of India) described the villages as 'little Republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves' and their union, he said, had 'contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all revolutions and changes which they have suffered. . . . I dread everything that has a tendency to break them up'.

But though Munro, Metcalfe, Elphinstone and other eminent British administrators praised these institutions and pleaded for their retention, they were doomed by the general policy of the Government. Their courts were replaced by the system which Munro had

condemned, the 'obscure, complicated, pedantic system of English Law' as another British writer called it, a few years before the Mutiny.[1] It is interesting that Sir William Sleeman, who was British Resident at Lucknow from 1840 to 1854, mentioned the horror with which the people of Oudh regarded the British legal system as the reason for the fact that – in his opinion – ninety-nine per cent of the people were opposed to annexation by the British. (This in spite of the fact that these people had been oppressed by Indian rulers who were guaranteed, as tributaries of the East India Company, against insurrection. It had been the old story of 'indirect rule', but the kings of Oudh had this one virtue – they had not interfered with the village system.) *Panchayat* justice was a thing once understood by every Indian, whereas the mere fact that a Hindu gave evidence in a British Court was 'presumptive evidence against the respectability of his character' – according to one authority.[2]

Yet the *panchayat* went down and the British system superseded it. What is really ironical is, of course, the fact that the present Indian administration has preserved the British system. The reason, probably, is that our system called into existence an Indian legal profession, and the lawyers of India have been her political leaders ever since. (Even Gandhi was a lawyer – though he did his best to forget it, except sometimes in an argument, when one could be conscious of the fact.) Yet the system which has survived British rule is that of which Thompson and Garratt wrote in their *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, when they recorded that during one military campaign 'whole populations fled in terror, not from the soldiery, but from the High Court that was believed to be accompanying them'.

The decline of village industries, accelerated by the deliberate policy of the Government, under pressure from Lancashire, finished off the *panchayats* eventually. The village schools went out of existence, owing to poverty and the taxation of school lands. The *panchayat* was lamented by more than one British administrator of later years, including Sir Henry Cotton, who said that 'a costly and mechanical centralisation has taken the place of the former system of local self-government and local arbitration'. The same institution won the highest praise from Max Müller and from many other distinguished authorities. But they wrote of the past. Practically speaking, the *panchayats* were dead when I visited India in 1929,

[1] John Dickinson, in *Government of India Under a Bureaucracy*, 1853.
[2] Frederick Shore, cited in the *Cambridge Shorter History of India*.

though there were a few surviving exceptions. It was not my good fortune to see any of these surviving *panchayats* in operation, but in Calcutta I had a very interesting account of them from a most unexpected source.

I returned from Jaya Prakash's village to Chapra and stayed a few days with my Moslem host, who was then fasting every day until sunset, as *Ramadan* had begun, when good Mohammedans observe this practice for a whole month. A Hindu engineer, who was a frequent visitor at the house, told me that each evening he sent food to the mosque when it was time for the Moslems to break their fast – it had been the custom in his family for many generations. I was sorry to leave Dr Mahmoud, whom I never saw again (he died before I returned to India). He was a very kind host and a man who could talk interestingly on a great variety of subjects, including his friendship with many of my own countrymen. One of these had been Wilfred Scawen Blunt, for whom I had long felt (and still retain) an unbounded admiration.

At a junction on my way to Patna I met Jaya Prakash again. He told me the police had been to see him with questions about me almost the moment that I left the village. We travelled to Patna together, crossing the Ganges on a steamer. On February 8th I arrived at Calcutta.

Here I was the guest for three days of an Indian magnate, Mr G. D. Birla, whom I had met at Wardha. Only once before had I lived in such luxury – at the house of a big landowner in the United Provinces, where I was an uninvited guest. (The landowner was away, and I stayed one night at his house with a magistrate who was inspecting his armoury.) I was almost in rags and shall never forget being taken into a bedroom which made me think of Hollywood films, and then down to a courtyard where six Daimlers stood with attendant chauffeurs. 'This car and chauffeur,' said Mr Birla's secretary, with a wave of his hand, 'will be at your disposal while you are at Birla Park.' Indeed, I made good use of them.

To Birla Park there came, one day while I was there, the members of the Commission which was then investigating labour conditions in India – the Whitley Commission, as it was generally called. It issued eventually one of the most useful reports ever put out by H.M. Stationery Office. The members came to tea, and out of curiosity I decided to meet them. Within a few minutes I found myself sitting next to the Chairman, Mr J. H. Whitley, the ex-Speaker

of the House of Commons. And our conversation was one that I shall always remember.

There was nothing 'cagey' about Whitley. He had seen and heard a great deal in India, and he spoke freely about it all. It was from him that I confirmed the story that the Government of Assam had 'practically forced' the managers of tea plantations to have liquor shops on their estates – the managers themselves had told him so. (The point was important at the time, in view of Gandhi's campaign against drink and drugs, and the suspicion – which this information confirmed – that the Government regarded the whole thing solely from the revenue standpoint. They had gone so far in Assam as to imprison those followers of Gandhi who had picketed the opium dens; and they had ignored a resolution which had been passed in the Assam Legislative Council – opposed only by Government-nominated members – which had asked for a progressive reduction in opium sales.)

But it was when I heard that the ex-Speaker had attended some of the surviving *panchayats* that I became most interested. He had been deeply impressed by the good order and good sense in their discussions, as interpreted to him; and I had the impression – unfortunately I cannot recall his actual words – that he compared these deliberations favourably with those that he had known in the Mother of Parliaments (though I do not suggest that this would have been setting a very high standard). What really impressed me most was his vehement insistence on a view that had long been my own – *that literacy was greatly overrated.* Literacy, he said, had been hopelessly confused with education. You could be literate without being educated, and educated without being literate – especially where a traditional culture existed, as in rural India. He talked of the time when 'England was efficiently governed by kings who could not even sign their own names'. He was the first Englishman I had ever talked to who did not seem to think that self-government depended upon an ability to read and write – a modern superstition and a very dangerous one. In later years I remember that my old friend, the artist Joseph Southall, once put the matter even more strongly. 'The Russian Revolution,' he said, 'happened because the Russian people couldn't read the *Daily Mail.*' (I am sure he would have agreed that the Revolution took the wrong turning from the time when the people learnt to read *Pravda* and the rest of the quotidian gospels.)

My interest in the *panchayat* was the beginning of a clearer

conception of a decentralised society. Such institutions provided the means, and I later discovered that similar traditional forms already existed, not only in India but in many other parts of the world where people were subject to foreign rule and were conveniently described by their rulers as 'unfit for self-government'. I studied the system more closely and also learnt, with great satisfaction, that Gandhi's own conception of a free India was 'a federation of village republics'. I hardly expected the Congress politicians to follow this line; and, in fact, the whole structure of the present Republic is modelled upon the British system – except that the Congress leaders have dealt drastically with the Indian princes. And yet there is hope, as I shall show in a later chapter, that village communities may still be revived.

A matter of some interest and satisfaction to me was that when, on my return to England, I embodied some of my thoughts on literacy and local self-government (with special reference to the history of the *panchayats*) in an article,[1] I found about two-thirds of this article quoted in an enormous footnote to a memorandum on Native Administration, by Sir Donald Cameron, at that time Governor of Tanganyika. Sir Donald made it clear that he felt the same principles had a direct bearing on the problems of Africa. Here, as in India, the idea of a local organisation which 'is always viewed as a representative body, and not as a body possessing inherent authority' (Sir Henry Maine's description of the *panchayat*) is a very common one. And it was no mere coincidence that on my recent visit to India I spent much of my time discussing the application to the needs of Africa of methods still used in the Indian villages and being further developed today by the 'Constructive Workers' (Gandhi's followers). My discussions with J. H. Whitley are directly linked in my mind with the long talks I had twenty years later with Michael Scott, the champion of the South-West African tribesmen, when we sat (on one occasion) in a mud hut overlooking the Ganges and discussed the emancipation of Africans through their own tribal organisations. . . .

By the time that I reached Calcutta I was already in a hurry to be back at Sabarmati. In a letter dated February 2nd Bapu had written apologising for a long silence. 'My correspondence is lying neglected,' he said. 'I simply cannot cope with it.' Evidently I had written and I must have made some offer of my help, for what it was worth, because Gandhiji went on to say: 'I have been thinking

[1] *Spectator*, August 2nd, 1930.

of your letter for the last three days. The real thing is likely to begin not before March.'

'Come when you like,' he continued. 'I wish you were here on February 14th. But I don't want to interrupt your experiences. The *ashram* is your home to come to whenever you like.' The 'real thing' to which Gandhi referred was the Civil Disobedience Campaign. It was in order to be at Sabarmati at that critical time that I cut short my visit to Bengal. It was not, however, lack of time but lack of anything suitably respectable to wear which made me refuse an invitation to dinner at the Bishop's Palace. It was an opportunity – unlikely to be repeated – to meet a whole bevy of bishops who had foregathered in Calcutta for some purpose; but in my rags I felt unable to accept this invitation.

CHAPTER FOUR

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the Rishis *and saints. It is meant for the common people as well.*

GANDHI

NOT LONG after I left Lahore I made another attempt to sum up in my mind what I really thought about Gandhiji. Though my opinion of him, especially in those early years, is of little objective value, it does show where I stood myself. Even in those days I noted that my attempted summary was 'sheer impertinence'; but what is still of possible interest is the impression made by Gandhiji on a young Englishman who was by no means uncritical.

> To an easy, temporising person like myself, [I wrote] his scorching passion for truth was almost terrifying – I was always afraid that I should lapse into one of those silly social lies that we Westerners tell so glibly when we are afraid to give offence or wish to avoid a long explanation, and that he would see through it! The day I spoke at Hinganghat I mentioned in his hearing that I was going to try to get out of the understanding, given in an unwary moment – I was very tired and had nothing to say at the meeting. I shall not forget his look of genuine incredulity as he said, 'But you can't go back on your word!' Completely out-quakered by a Hindu, I had to give in and go. He gives to each one who comes in contact with him the impression of a real personal affection, but he can sever every attachment without sign of pain. They say that when Magunlal Gandhi died he was the coolest man at the *ashram* and ordained 'business as usual' and harder work to make up for the loss of so good a worker. His conversation, speeches and writings are unemotional, logical, precise and less involved than is usual with Indians. You will find a sort of measured wit and choice metaphor, but never bombast or sentimentality.

I then discussed his experimental attitude to life. (How appropriately was his autobiography called *My Experiments with Truth.*) I was interested in the relationship of experiment to a sense of certainty, which was equally characteristic of him.

This certainty is as marked in Bapu as his willingness to learn and discuss; he is one of the few people I have ever met who understands that true toleration does not mean vacuity or sitting on the fence. His opinions are strong, and with some, notably those on sex and other sociological questions, I personally cannot agree. I look on him as I would a great Catholic saint, admiring wholeheartedly his character and spiritual power, whilst judging his views with complete detachment.

In various articles, about this time, I tried to explain the nature of the coming conflict, as Congress viewed it. The Round Table Conference was to meet in the summer; and in England even those who were most sympathetic to Gandhi were – with a few exceptions – unable to understand why he was planning a civil disobedience campaign. Gandhi's reply, as I explained in an article that appeared in one of the first numbers of the *Political Quarterly*, was that he 'would rather remain in chains of iron than chains of gold'. Lord Irwin's statement that the ultimate decision as to India's future was the 'undoubted right' of the British Parliament was considered, in 1930, as a clear indication that the conference would be pure make-believe, designed to keep India quiet for another few years while pointless discussions continued. Gandhi – to use his own phrase – had struck 'with the thick end of the wedge' when he had insisted on a clear declaration that the conference was to be really representative and that its object should be the formulation of a Dominion Status Constitution. When this was refused – together with the demand for immediate measures to prove the *bona fides* of the Government – events passed beyond Gandhi's control. That, at least, was the way I saw the matter.

The Calcutta *Statesman*, however, found that 'Mr Gandhi has been piling Pelion upon Ossa in a series of Himalayan blunders' – a pleasant fantasy which nevertheless summarised 'moderate' British opinion in India. On the other hand an Indian rival announced that Gandhiji had asked Congress 'to pitch its wagon to the star'. My own views coincided neither with those of my countrymen nor with the over-confidence of Congress. Goldsmith's description of Burke seemed to me to fit Gandhi – 'too fond of the right to pursue the expedient.' I had no doubt that he was morally justified; but I had, on the other hand, no hope of his success. With this in view I wrote at Chapra words which contrasted strangely with the 'complete detachment' I had claimed when writing of Gandhi two or three weeks earlier:

It is a strange thing, but I have felt Bapu's personality more since I have been away from him than I did when with him. I always respected him, but now I feel far more strongly about him. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that I am as interested in the approaching crisis in his life as I am in the approaching crisis in Indian history. Fate is forcing his hand. His own desire turns increasingly towards intensive work among the peasants – *khaddar*, temperance, anti-opium, anti-untouchability, etc. I feel sure he is tired of all the wrangling and wangling of the political world, and the necessity of working so often with people so much less sincere than himself. At Sabarmati and Wardha he did no public speaking, but worked quietly among the people who loved and understood him; and I am certain that there he was far happier than ever he was in the mêlée of politics.

But now I see him, a pathetic and tragic figure, drawn by circumstances over which he has no control into a position from which there is no turning back. Other people's stupidity has produced the crisis, and the country looks to him to see it through. No one dreads this struggle more than he does; but he feels it has been forced upon the country and knows he is the only man who can hope for success, however dim the hope. No one will ever know what agony this decision has cost him.

Something had certainly happened to me, for on the same day I wrote: 'I no longer wonder at the devotion of the blind masses. Rather am I one of them.'

I shall have more to say later of the places which I visited before returning to Sabarmati. I was half afraid of the adventures which lay before me – it was ordinary physical fear, I think, that an Englishman mixed up with Indian 'sedition' might be treated with more than usual viciousness by the police and military (and I had by then accumulated plenty of evidence as to 'atrocities' which made a gloomy picture). At each place where I halted on my way back I felt a great desire to stay, for many of these places were very beautiful in the Indian spring and seemed remote from the political storm-centre. But it was to the storm-centre that I was doggedly making my way – the place that had once seemed so monotonously peaceful.

I was worried, too, by a sense of personal responsibility with regard to British press statements. There seemed to be so few of us who were in a position to contradict the sort of nonsense which was appearing in the London papers – of which many had now reached me – and I was quite without experience as a journalist. India was

very much in the news, and the wildest assertions were being made without query or contradiction. It was said that Gandhi was finished – he counted for nothing in India. Or, again, it was said that he was the sole cause of 'disaffection'. It did not square, but the attacks rarely did. Congress, too, was said to represent only an 'infinitesimal minority', but its Lahore decisions were nevertheless front-page story in Britain and the subject of angry leading articles. A. G. Gardiner dismissed Gandhi as a 'dreamer' and informed the readers of *John Bull* that there was nothing more behind the *khadi* movement than Gandhi's dislike of machinery (a 'dislike' which he repudiated). *Swaraj* was unfair to the Moslem minority, who would be at the mercy of the Hindus. On the other hand it was not in the interests of the Hindus, who would be trampled upon by the more virile Moslems. . . .

The flow of newspapers and cuttings never seemed to stop – an endless cataract of misquotation, misrepresentation and crude falsehood. Few Indians, I realised, could write a letter or an article which was likely to be published in the British press. The number of Indians who could write presentably in English was very limited; and in any case, the British papers clearly did not wish to publish the truth. As a Labour Government was then in office, this conspiracy of suppression and distortion covered the Labour Party journals – except the *New Leader*, organ of the I.L.P. (which was at that time still affiliated to the Labour Party).

But even if an Indian could have obtained a hearing, prejudice would probably have dismissed whatever he said. There was a clear understanding in those days that British officials and newspaper correspondents stated the facts objectively, however much the interests of the officials, the Government or the press lords might be involved. On the other hand, an Indian could not be objective unless he was a Government yes-man. Any Indian statement could therefore be dismissed as propaganda – 'mere', 'lying', 'pernicious', or whatever adjective you preferred. Only one Englishman would be able to speak from Gandhi's side. Mirabehn, it is true, was there; but she paid little or no attention to the British papers. In that she may have been wise; but the young man on his way to Sabarmati had other opinions. It might be hopeless to tilt at the Fleet Street windmill, but it seemed to me dishonourable not to make the effort. At the age of forty-four I am more – if you like – struthious. I use newspapers for lighting fires (their proper destiny) and seldom for any other purpose.

I arrived at Sabarmati on February 27th, and received a memorable welcome after my three months of absence. Outwardly everything appeared the same, but the discipline had been tightened up and the place somehow *felt* different – the difference between a rehearsal and a first performance. I was given a new room, in the Students' Hostel, which had (I noted) 'the advantage of a pleasant balcony and the disadvantage of two nests of wild bees just outside'. The bees were attracted in the evenings by my hurricane lamp. . . .

However, my thoughts were not allowed to dwell long on bees. Bapu sent for me and told me that he had a job for me to do, if I was willing. It was a curious job, too. He was making a final effort to come to terms with the Viceroy and was writing a letter begging the British Government, through Lord Irwin, to reconsider its attitude. As the letter gave a time limit and made it clear that Civil Disobedience was about to start 'unless', it was commonly called 'Gandhi's Ultimatum'. It was not much like my idea of an ultimatum. It began with 'Dear Friend', and explained that the writer's object was 'no less than to convert the British people through non-violence. . . . I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own.' The letter ended:

> This letter is not in any way intended as a threat, but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence and whom Providence seems to have sent to me, as it were, for the very purpose.

The letter was signed 'Your sincere friend, M. K. Gandhi.' It was dated Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, March 2nd, 1930. Three days after his arrival there the 'young English friend' set out for New Delhi.

Before I went, Gandhi insisted that I should read the letter carefully, as he did not wish me to associate myself with it unless I was in complete agreement with its contents. My taking of this letter was, in fact, intended to be symbolic of the fact that this was not merely a struggle between the Indians and the British. By using an English courier instead of a postage stamp Bapu had deliberately dramatised this fact for all the world to know. But the symbolism would have been false had I merely taken the letter without completely associating myself with what it contained. I studied the letter carefully.

The fact that Gandhiji had no quarrel with the British people, as such, was further emphasised in the text:

> I do not intend harm to a single Englishman, [he wrote] or to any legitimate interest he may have in India. . . . Though I hold the British rule in India to be a curse, I do not, therefore, consider Englishmen in general to be worse than any other people. . . . I have the privilege of claiming many Englishmen as dearest friends. Indeed, much that I have learnt of the evil of British rule is due to the writings of frank and courageous Englishmen. . . . [He held that] conversion of a nation that has, consciously or unconsciously, preyed upon another, far more numerous, far more ancient and no less cultured than itself, is worth any amount of risk.

Typically enough the old man was actually looking at the coming struggle as something that would spiritually benefit Great Britain, in accordance with his own formula 'The oppressor is doubly entitled to be redeemed'. I could easily have endorsed a document less generously worded. I returned with the letter (its contents were still 'strictly confidential' though everybody knew a letter was to be sent) and Gandhiji asked whether I had any criticisms to make.

'Yes,' I said.

Surprised disciples gaped. 'Well?' asked Bapu.

'There's a comma missing – here.'

He looked, nodded, and filled in the comma. I have often felt since that the comma, too, was symbolic – it represented the extent of my contribution to Indian history. But in the days that followed it was very difficult to realise this, for I hit the headlines forty-eight hours later.

Outside the *ashram* nobody in India seemed to know who had the letter, and two other people were suspected – one being Motilal Nehru, who left Ahmedabad for New Delhi about the same time as myself. Pursued by eager reporters, he kept them all in play, for the more he laughed and denied that he had the letter, the more he drew their fire until I had delivered it to the Viceroy's Private Secretary. The old man told me his story later, with a boyish delight in the whole game. In fact his strategy ensured for me a very peaceful journey, as the unknown young Englishman was quite unsuspected by the news hawks – except, oddly enough, in Britain. The London papers had the story on March 3rd, direct from Ahmedabad, while correspondents in New Delhi were still on the wrong scent.

To my great relief my mission proved purely formal. For – astonishing as it now seems in retrospect – I had actually been briefed to answer questions relating to Gandhiji's letter and the terms on which he would suspend the launching of Civil Disobedience. The press – truthful for once – later recorded that 'Mr Reynolds was wearing *khaddar* shorts and a Gandhi cap[1] when he entered the Viceregal Lodge'. But a good hour and a half after I delivered the letter to Irwin's Private Secretary the journalists were still laying siege to Motilal Nehru, and my *khaddar* shorts and Gandhi cap did not become news until some hours after that. The press was waiting in force at the Delhi railway station when I returned to Ahmedabad, after one night in the capital. Only one reporter had succeeded in running me to earth in the hostel of a Moslem university where my host – Gandhi's youngest son, Devadas – was then on the staff.

One Indian paper said it had been stated that I was 'an M.A. and a research student of the Cambridge University', a story which was promptly accepted as factual and repeated by every other journal, without any attempt at verification. The words 'when I was at Cambridge' were even attributed to me in one of the many fictitious interviews which appeared. In the weeks which followed I suffered from the sort of thing that Gandhi bore patiently for a lifetime, and that small dose was enough for me. Indian journalists hashed up my words out of sheer inefficiency – mainly due, I think, to an insufficient knowledge of the English language. On the other side, the British correspondents could hardly have been absolved from a suspicion of malice, for their method was one of distortion and invention of which the deliberate object was clearly ridicule. Of this perhaps the briefest example occurred on my return from India, that summer. I had learnt – so I thought – how to deal with the press, and I refused to give any interview to a reporter of the London *Star*, explaining shortly that my experience in this matter had been too unfortunate. A paragraph appeared that evening, saying that I had arrived home but had told the *Star* representative: 'My lips are sealed.'

You cannot, as I soon discovered, fight against that sort of thing. There is nothing libellous in it. It merely makes you look an ass, which it is intended to do. When you are in India and receive your

[1] Not – I am glad to record – a sun helmet, as stated by Louis Fischer in his *Life of Mahatma Gandhi*: I am slightly piqued at the suggestion of incongruity.

English papers over a fortnight old it is still more hopeless to take up such points, or even more serious ones. I soon found also that there were far too many of these gadflies at work, and too much to do without wasting my time in replies or protests which the offending journals were not likely to publish. When I wrote for the few organs of the 'left' which would accept an article there was always something much more important to occupy my time and the space allowed me. But I think, on more mature reflection, that this Baptism of Ridicule may be one of the most important tests in a man's life if he takes up unpopular causes. I also think that I might have stood up to it better. But my projection into notoriety was so sudden that I was completely unprepared for it.

The days that followed my return from Delhi were eventful. Preparation was being made at Sabarmati for the 'Salt March'. To our great disappointment, Mirabehn and I were told that we were not to go with Gandhi on this expedition. We were to remain at the *ashram* and would be given other work to do. In my case this was to include helping with Gandhi's weekly journal, *Young India*, for so long as it was published. (As we expected, it had to be closed down eventually, owing to a refusal to give the 'securities' demanded by the Government. But it long continued, even after that, as a cyclostyled news-sheet, illegally issued.) It was Gandhi's intention that after his own arrest and that of his secretary, Mahadev Desai, I should edit this paper. As things turned out, I never did; but while Bapu and Mahadev were still at large *The Times of India* (the principal British-owned newspaper) came out with a story that I was already editor-in-charge. This was an occasion for the usual jaded wit; but for once here was something worth a reply. An Indian news agency gladly circulated my statement that this was 'one of the many inaccuracies' on the part of *The Times of India* with regard to myself – to which I added a rider that if ever I did edit *Young India* I hoped I should show more respect for truth than I had observed in the *Times*.

Sardar Patel was arrested shortly after my return to Sabarmati. 'It was a clever stroke,' I wrote. 'In all practical affairs I suppose Vallabhbhai Patel is easily the ablest leader in the country. During the recent conferences here regarding plans he was bored and restless – just as he was at Lahore. He has a healthy dislike for committees and minutes and resolutions. . . . He believes in direct action and has a genius for knowing when to begin and where to stop.'

Vast crowds, including numerous reporters, press photographers and film cameramen now began to invade the *ashram* every day. In a life where privacy did not exist it was impossible to escape from them. At last came the Great Day – March 12th. The crowd on the evening of the 11th was estimated at ten thousand, most of whom stayed all night. By 6 a.m. on the 12th the crowd was larger than ever. At 6.30 the 'First Column' formed in the road. A few short hymns were chanted and Bapu set off with his picked men, some of us who were not in the party going ahead to clear a way for them. He sent us back after the first mile and went on towards Ahmedabad. We heard later that the crowds increased as the party neared the city, the bridge being impassable on this account. But they forded the river a little further down. A film made of that march to the sea was banned by the Government, which made it easier for British-owned papers in India to represent it as the trek of a forlorn little band, seen off by a pathetic handful of friends, and passing for over three weeks through the apathetic countryside. . . .

> It is not unlikely [I wrote in my journal], that I have really said good-bye now to that quaint, heroic figure. I shall always place him in a category by himself, if only because my own reaction to him was so unique. . . . It was after I left him that I began to know him. I met him again without any memorable thrill because (I suppose) affection that begins and ripens in absence cannot be increased by proximity. I parted from him without regret. . . . He is as much my friend now as ever, and always will be. I know of no one else for whom I have this sense of detached attachment. [As for Gandhiji himself, I noted his high spirits on the morning that he left]: The weight of responsibility that made him such a pathetic figure to me when the great decision was in the making seemed to pass from him.

The arrest of Sardar Patel, he said, had 'cleared his path' – which did *not* mean that he was glad to be rid of his lieutenant.

But life at Sabarmati suddenly became very quiet and very flat. There were not many of us left at the *ashram* and those who had gone with Bapu included most of my best friends. Others – less welcome to me – had already disappeared before the Salt March began. These included the Fasting Man and the man who realised God on a diet of peanuts. For me the anti-climax was almost unbearable. A little bitterly I recorded that 'I do the donkey work of *Young India*, study, write a bit for the press, perform the office of

sweeper . . . and amuse the children'. I was also becoming continually more weary of being an object of curiosity and answering the same silly questions every day. I would be asked if I preferred Eastern or Western Civilisation, and the questioners would look quite hurt at my reply – 'Western, decidedly.' What had it to do with India's struggle for freedom or my admiration for Gandhi and his methods?

Only a day after he left Sabarmati Gandhiji wrote me one of his brief notes. He must have guessed I should be restless. He spoke of the help he wanted me to give on *Young India* and of the importance of the *ashram* itself, adding: 'You I hold to be a gift from God for the advancement of the work.' Less than three weeks later he was compelled to write in a very different strain. There had been a particularly vicious attack on him to which I had replied in a sudden explosion of anger, and he had read my reply in the *Bombay Chronicle*.

'I did not like your writing . . .' he said in a letter of March 31st. 'It is not *ahimsa*[1]. . . When you have a good cause, never descend to personalities. What I want to emphasise is not merely bad manners. It is the underlying violence that worries me.' Bapu went so far as to suggest that I should apologise to the man against whom I had tried to defend him – but only, of course, if I accepted, on reflection, the truth of his criticism. I do not know whether I did accept his position intellectually. I think not. I only knew that Gandhiji's 'gift from God' had proved rather a flop and that he was now asking me to do something that would cost the hell of a lot in personal pride. So I did as he asked. In apologising I rubbed in the point that I did so at Gandhiji's request, so that the man who had attacked him so unfairly should realise his magnanimity. This had the desired effect, and I received a very friendly reply, in which the writer said that this was 'what he might have expected' from Gandhi.

Evidently I told the old man what I had done, for he wrote on April 4th that he was 'delighted', adding – in reply to some comment of mine – 'There is no question of restoration of confidence, for it was never lost.' He spoke of the 'slow and sometimes painful process' of assimilating the doctrine of *ahimsa*, and of mental violence that needed to be eradicated. Two days later, having received the other man's reply to my apology, which I had forwarded to him, he wrote expressing his pleasure.

All this time Gandhi was on his way to the sea, passing slowly

[1] Non-violence.

from village to village. The Salt Marchers were making for Dandi, on the Gujerat coast – one of the many places where huge salt fields were left by crystallisation after the floods subsided. The illegal collection of this salt began on April 6th, and that morning there was a meeting outside Ahmedabad, close by the river. It must have been held very early in the morning, because I noted that 'a small part of us walked there, leaving at 5.30', also that 'in spite of the early hour there were about 7,000 people present'.

It was a short meeting at which representatives from the various religious communities read brief appropriate extracts from their different scriptures. This was the plan all over India on that day, the smallest community in each particular area speaking first. At Ahmedabad, the Christians being easily the smallest minority, Gandhi's 'Envoy Extraordinary' (or Messenger Boy, as others called me) was the first to speak. I read the Magnificat. After the others had followed in turn we concluded with *Bande Mataram*, and thirty volunteers marched straight to the town where they began the sale of contraband salt. Reading my journals now, I cannot help wondering where they had procured this salt, as (officially) the campaign had only begun that morning on the distant coast. Characteristically the occasion was observed as a semi-fast at the *ashram* – our first and last meal for the day (after our return from the meeting) consisting of milk and dried pulse. They had celebrated Independence Day on January 26th very similarly, as I had already heard. My inside non-co-operated, and for two days after that horrible meal I was ill. When they had another semi-fast a week later, in memory of the Amritsar Massacre, I avoided *dahl*, and have tried to do so ever since, especially uncooked.

The 'salt *satyagraha*' was taken up in all parts of India, and arrests all over the country soon made the principal news, though Bapu remained at liberty. Many of my friends were among the first to be arrested – including Jamnalal Bajaj of Wardha, Devadas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. To avoid flooding the jails the Government policy was in most cases to arrest only leaders. The law-breaking volunteers were not arrested as a rule, at first, but the police seized the contraband salt wherever they could. There were many stories of police brutality, and Mahadev Desai asked me to visit Dholera (a small coast town) and investigate. I left on April 11th, reaching the nearest station after six hours' travelling. Before covering the last eighty miles by car I visited some under-trial prisoners and attended

a mass meeting, where I was suddenly told that I was to speak. (I was later to become accustomed to these sudden demands – my wife suffered similarly on her recent visit.) It was at this place – Dhandhuka – that I realised the extent to which my trivial rôle at New Delhi had been built up into something like a legend; for I was assured, to my great surprise, that the crowd which had come in from the surrounding villages had been much increased by the rumour that I was to be present.

That night I slept at Dholera and saw the *satyagrahis* at work the next morning. They marched round the village, singing, and at about 7 a.m. started off at the double for the salt fields, about four miles away. I went in the rickety old car that had brought me from Dhandhuka.

> A cool wind [I wrote] was blowing from the sea – such a breeze as we never get at Sabarmati – and we bumped gaily over the flat, low-lying ground along a track that consisted of little but a few cart ruts. On either side of us were dry, uncultivated fields. Each year these are deeply flooded by the monsoons, and the soil is so saturated with salt that it is quite useless. The rain-water carries this into the wells, and it is impossible to get really fresh water to drink in these parts.
>
> After four miles of these mud flats, we came to the salt deposits to which the *Satyagrahis* were on their way. Here the water stands in deep pools after the floods, until by process of evaporation the salt crystallises in a thick layer. On top it is dirty, but if you pick up a lump (it will break off in large sheets an inch thick) you can see that inside it is clean and white. A large tract of the salt fields had been recently turned over with farm implements so as to ruin the salt by mixing it with earth. This had been done by Government orders, but the process had been interrupted by the labourers employed, who struck work as soon as they were told the object of this destruction.

We waited until the volunteers arrived, and then returned to the Customs House at Dholera, where we knew the police would be waiting for them. The wind became very hot as the sun rose. Out in the fierce blaze where the salt fields lay there appeared the only mirage I have ever seen – a clear but completely deceptive view of windswept water. It was on the same day, but somewhat later, that I saw another phenomenon – a swirling column of dust that rose suddenly from the plain.

But if it was my day for 'seeing things' I certainly did not see what I had been told to expect. So far as I know, there was no brutality on the part of the police that day – at least, shall we say, nothing more brutal than one can see on an English playing-field. The whole thing was rather like a game – the old game of 'Fox and Geese', with the *satyagrahis* trying to get through the police lines. Then followed a struggle when any of the law-breakers were caught, for the volunteers clung to their bags of salt strongly unless they were arrested. The two British officers in charge of the police did not seem to me bad types, and one story that I was told by the *satyagrahis* seemed to confirm this. It seemed that on a previous expedition one man had held his bag of salt against the efforts of eight policemen. This in itself indicated that the police, in this instance at least, cannot have been using the foul methods of which they were so often accused. (Sometimes, as I later confirmed, such charges were true enough.) This story ended happily, for the Scottish officer in charge had ordered his men to give up the struggle, and had shaken hands with the stubborn law-breaker.

A rumour went ahead of me, on my return journey to Ahmedabad, to the effect that one of the under-trial prisoners at Dhandhuka had been tried and was on his way to Sabarmati Jail – about three-quarters of a mile from the *ashram*. Crowds of villagers gathered at two stations with garlands for this hero, but not finding him on the train they garlanded me instead. At one place I was pressed for news of what was happening at Dholera. As there seemed to be no one capable of interpreting a speech, I distributed the contraband salt which I had with me, giving the crowd to understand that this was the news. It was an effective move, and they certainly scrambled for the pieces of salt as though they had been gold coins. The next day the salt campaign, which had been confined to picked volunteers for one week, became a mass movement wherever salt deposits provided the opportunity. I wrote an article for *Young India*, gladly giving credit to the police and their officers at Dholera for having behaved very decently in the circumstances; but in this 'mass *satyagraha*' which had begun on April 13th a man was said to have been severely injured by the police at this place. I still felt sure myself that this had happened against the instructions of the officers, but my article was not published by the Acting Editor.

When Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested I saw my first *hartal* – passing through Ahmedabad, where every mill was closed for the day

and scarcely a shop was to be found open. These *hartals* became frequent events as the campaign developed. Mahadev Desai, the Acting Editor of *Young India*, was soon arrested with a lorryload of contraband salt, and on April 24th Bapu wrote: 'How will you feel about *Y.I.* now Mahadev is off?' He had broken up his camp at Dandi and begun a rapid tour of Bombay Presidency. Before he left the district of Jalalpur *The Times of India* produced its first and only specimen of genuine wit at his expense; and in spite of its malice I found it sufficiently amusing to copy, sending it to my friends in England. *Swadeshi*, I should perhaps explain, means home produced (Indian) – as distinct from *bilayati* (foreign – hence 'Blighty' for England). Following as his model some well-known lines of Horace, an anonymous satirist produced the following:

MAHATMA LOQUITUR

Anglicos odi, puer, apparatus.
Displicent vestes nisi sunt swadeshae.
Civicos sperno titulos et aurum
Causidicorum.
Me manu fausta rotulam obsoletam
Rite volventem videat Jalalpur
Audiant undae maris et salinae
Stulte loquentem.[1]

By the end of April the Indian spring was already past – spring and autumn in one act, for the ground was strewn with dead leaves, almost pushed from the branches by their successors. The wind from the drying river bed at Sabarmati brought no relief as the sun climbed higher – only more heat and often sand. 'One drips all day,' I wrote, 'like hot sealing wax.' I began to feel my own limitations,

[1] Englished (somewhat freely):

These gadgets of England disgust me, my boy –
Like Lancashire clothing they irk and annoy –
Your Government titles, they give me no joy
And I spit on the barrister's fee.
Jalalpur shall see me, with fingers of fate,
As I trundle my spinning-wheel, long out of date,
In ritual manner, what time I relate
My woes to the waves of the sea.

(One might add that there was good precedent for this. Demosthenes used to address the waves on the seashore as part of his training for speaking to the noisy Athenians.)

envying the hardiness of Mirabehn who seemed to stand up to *ashram* conditions in all weathers without any evidence of strain. For my own part, I was already beginning to wonder how much longer I could remain a useful member of such a community.

About this time, in response to an appeal by Gandhi, large numbers of *patels* (village headmen) had been resigning. According to *The Times of India* this was due to intimidation by the villagers. The villagers were 'non-co-operating' with the Government, and the same authority attributed this to the intimidation of the villagers by the *patels*. They were apparently bullying each other, in turns. The Government 'Director of Information' also issued regular and authentic bulletins on the struggle. In one of them, I remember, he referred to a mysterious industry which he called 'hand-loom spinning'. Such were the compensations of life as the heat and the struggle both became more intense.

Near the beginning of May I visited Gandhi at Karadi and he again raised the question of my editing *Young India* after his arrest. I was doing most of the work on the spot, but under his direction, which he had resumed since Mahadev's arrest. This had not prevented a second crop of rumours that I was already editing the paper – a story which appeared this time in the English press.

Visitors continued to come to the *ashram*. There was the Good Lady who came to us in the Name of the Lord – a Quakeress, I regret to say, on a globetrot. Having been received with every courtesy and kindness, she treated the community at prayers to an unsolicited lecture on the benefits of British rule. We much preferred some visits by Army officers who came from a military cantonment across the river. They included the Chaplain, a jolly, not very intelligent man, who seemed to think it a great sin for a Christian to be living in such heathenish asceticism. But he was at least courteous, and invited me to return his visit – which I did. I found the officers delightfully naïve in their questions about Gandhi and Congress. 'We never read the other point of view,' they said, and again: 'We only read *The Times of India*, you know.' We did not get very far, but I was glad I went into the Lions' Den. In my journals I find these concluding comments:

> Arguing about politics with the average Englishman out here always reminds me of some arguments I once had about geography with a man who believed that the world was flat. The discussion is completely addled. . . .

As I was going, the padré said: 'You know, I'm a bit of a Bolshie myself.' For a moment I was completely nonplussed. But, recovering myself quickly, I replied: 'Well, if it comes to that, I'm fundamentally a Conservative.' So we parted excellent friends.

Early on May 8th came the rumour of Gandhi's arrest, together with the first account of a massacre by the military authorities at Peshawar. We first guessed at the arrest of Bapu when the Government cut off all telephone and telegraphic communication from Surat. This they did during the whole of the night of May 7th, picketing all roads with armed police and 'detaining' the entire railway staff at Navsari (the nearest station to Gandhi's camp at Karadi).

As soon as the news of Gandhiji's arrest was confirmed I drove into Ahmedabad with a dear old Moslem member of the *ashram* (always referred to as 'the Iman Sahib') and two other Congress leaders. I quote once more from my journals:

> In Ahmedabad there was a complete *hartal* – shops closed and mills idle, but no sign of rowdyism. Presently, however, we drove into a street where there was a crowd in a bit of a ferment. We stopped the car and enquired as to what had happened. The people told us that two armoured cars had just gone by with machine guns. We drove on after the armoured cars, and found that they had apparently turned in at the Police Station. After that we went to the *Young India* office, where a note soon arrived requesting the presence of the Imam Sahib and one of the Congress leaders at the Magistrate's house. They proceeded there immediately and found the Magistrate much agitated. Under the circumstances, he told them, he had no recourse but to patrol the town with armoured cars! The Congress chiefs told him that this was the surest way to provoke trouble, and said that if he would agree to keep his armoured cars, armed police and soldiers, etc out of the way and shut all the liquor shops, *they* would be responsible for the peace of the city. This he at last agreed to do. The armoured cars and the rest of the 'law and order' machinery were parked out of the way. All liquor shops, Indian and foreign, were closed for one day, and absolute peace was maintained under what was virtually Congress Rule. This has been done on several occasions in different parts of the country since I have been here, and wherever Congress have been allowed to take control of the situation there has been complete order. Every single instance of

rioting and disorder of which I have heard so far has occurred when the police have insisted on handling the matter their own way.

The time of the arrest (12.45 a.m.) and the circumstances were interesting. That night Mirabehn drew my attention to a passage in Matthew and said: 'Have you noticed that?' She was pointing to the last words of the twenty-first chapter: 'But when they sought to lay hands upon him, they feared the multitude because they took him for a prophet.' I turned over a few pages and pointed in turn to Matthew xxvi. 55: 'Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and ye laid no hold on me.' I have already mentioned one alleged incident at the time of the arrest, in discussing Bapu's genius for studied anti-climax. I cannot say for certain if it was true, but that story about him cleaning his teeth instead of making a speech was certainly characteristic. And again, I cannot vouch for the story that some of the Indian police joined in a parting hymn or that there were tears in their eyes. Such stories are too easily invented. But Gandhiji's companions were certainly allowed to sing a hymn before he was taken away; and that was an act of courtesy to the credit of those who made the arrest.

The news from Peshawar was terrible – it was not unlike General Dyer's massacre at Amritsar in 1919. But it had a heartening side. The courage shown by unarmed people under fire from the military was something new. The mutiny of two platoons of the Garhwali Rifles (a Hindu regiment), who refused to fire on their Moslem fellow-countrymen, was another sign of the times. (At their trial, later, where these men received heavy sentences, they said: 'We will not shoot our unarmed brothers. You may blow us from the guns, if you like.') Not without reason did the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent, Ashmead Bartlett, express the greatest alarm – it was the beginning of a nationalist movement within the Indian forces which was one day to facilitate the formation of Subhas Bose's 'National Army' out of prisoners taken by the Japanese; and it led on to the Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946. Less than sixteen years after those Garhwali heroes refused to join in the Peshawar massacre, the Bombay correspondent of the *Daily Mail* (of all English papers the one that had most obstinately denied the existence of any real national movement in India, apart from a few scheming lawyers, out-of-work graduates and 'fanatics') was to comment on the Naval

Mutiny that: 'The real mainspring of the mutiny has been the desire for independence which is now sweeping across the colour belt . . .' In so short a time that I could certainly not have believed it in 1930, the ranks of Tuscany, though they did not cheer, had learnt to face the facts. The real cause of that post-war mutiny, according to John Fisher (*Daily Mail*, February 25th, 1946) was 'the existence of British rule in India'. It raised a problem 'that no amount of reforms or increases in pay will eliminate'.

Many Indians believe that the Naval Mutiny, more than any other single event, determined the policy of the Labour Government in implementing Churchill's wartime promises. I do not know. There were so many contributory causes – political, economic, military – in addition to an admitted change in the attitude of most British residents in India and the deep personal impression made by Gandhi and his methods on world opinion, that it seems to me to be pure speculation if one selects any particular event or development as 'the cause' of what was undoubtedly a revolutionary change in the attitude of all the political leaders in England. What we can say with certainty is that the Garhwali Mutiny was recognised at the time as one of the most significant events in the struggle of 1930. It was certainly, also, a true pointer to the future.

The third fact which marks the Peshawar disturbances of spring, 1930, as important is that the North-West Frontier Province is ninety-two per cent Moslem. The association from that time onwards of the Pathans of the N.W.F.P. with the Congress cause was one of the clearest answers to the monotonous lie that Congress was 'a Hindu organisation'. Always resourceful, *The Times of India* explained that unrest on the frontier was caused by Congress 'agitators' who had been inciting Moslems in the N.W.F.P. against the Sarda Act. This Act, prohibiting child marriages, has been claimed (*a*) as a result of Kathleen Mayo's propaganda, and (*b*) as a triumph of British rule; so that a few words of explanation may be necessary here. As regards Kathleen Mayo's book[1] it is sufficient to say that the Act was preceded by years of agitation on the part of Indian reformers, long before Miss Mayo's name had ever been

[1] *Mother India*, a compendium of all the filth which could be found in India (or anywhere else) plus many gems from Miss Mayo's imagination – therefore a best seller. The dust-cover of the edition in which I read it had a quotation from the *New Statesman*, showing again how far we have moved. The *New Statesman* review had said that this book 'makes the claim for *Swaraj* seem nonsense and the will to grant it almost a crime'.

heard in India, and that similar Acts had been passed in Baroda, Mysore and Indore before her book was written. The claim on behalf of the British has been made, characteristically, by Mr Beverley Nichols in his preposterous *Verdict on India*, where he says that the Act was 'fought, tooth and nail, by the orthodox Hindus', and gives all the credit to the enlightened British rulers.

The facts are very simple. The Bill had been sponsored throughout by the Indian nationalists. In the Legislative Assembly it was opposed by the Government and by all members (save one) of the 'nominated' bloc, i.e. nominees of the British Government, who constituted nearly one-third of the Assembly members, under the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution. My friend Horace Alexander, in *The Indian Ferment* (1929), had charitably explained that the Government opposition was 'not from any lack of sympathy with Indian social reform, but through timidity . . .' Eventually, Government opposition had been withdrawn, the nominated bloc remaining neutral, and the nationalists had passed the Bill. But, as the executive power was in no way responsible to the legislature, the apathy of the Government guaranteed the ineffectiveness of the new law. H. N. Brailsford, in his *Rebel India*, quoted the case of an attempt to set a precedent by a conviction under the Sarda Act – a prosecution in the Punjab – when the convicted person was immediately pardoned by the Government. 'After that,' he remarked, 'the Act became virtually a dead letter.'

This digression may have some general interest – it does at least help to explain the 'backwardness' of India today when one realises the attitude of its past rulers to social reform. It also throws some light on the type of calumny which was once used to discredit Congress; for in spite of the ingenious story in *The Times of India* it was hardly likely that Congress people would 'agitate' against a measure which they themselves (or rather, those of them who had been trying to work the Constitution) had pushed through against Government opposition. It would have been much more credible had anyone suggested that the Government was itself inciting Moslems against the Sarda Act and blaming Congress (quite rightly) for its existence. I certainly learnt a great deal about the ethics of journalism while I was in India, but I am so incurably naïve that the things journalists get away with still astonish me.

The North-West Frontier was to play a very prominent part in the future, of which the 1930 'disturbances' were only a beginning.

In the Provincial Elections of 1937 Congress proved to be the strongest party in the N.W.F.P.[1], and in the post-war elections of 1946 this ninety-two per cent Moslem province gave them a clear majority – out of fifty seats, thirty were won by Congress and two more by other nationalists, opposed to the 'Pakistan' policy. (It was significant that the two seats reserved for big landowners fell to the Moslem League, which had adopted the 'Pakistan' idea in 1940.) But tragedy lay ahead for the gallant leaders of the Frontier Province. Partition found them cut off from India; and the sudden rise of the Moslem League to influence and power in the Moslem territories between the N.W.F.P. and the Indian Union left them helpless. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, 'the Gandhi of the Frontier', and all his principal followers, were thrown into jail by the Pakistan Government, and there they remain at the time when this is written.[2] It is quite impossible to discover whether the Pathans as a whole have succumbed to the usual anti-Indian atrocity propaganda, or whether they have been forcibly suppressed. Their contribution to India's struggle for freedom remains, in either case, and is remembered with deep gratitude in the Republic of India today.

My own adventures on that first visit to India came to an end soon after Gandhi's arrest. I remained in the country about two more months; but it very soon became obvious to me that my work at Sabarmati was finished. Bapu had twice made it clear to me that he wished me to edit *Young India* after his arrest, unless his secretary Pyaralal was free to undertake the work – a proviso he had added when I saw him at Karadi. Even at the time I doubted my fitness for such a responsibility – today, I am extremely glad that I was saved from it. Gandhiji had left no instructions with any other person, and I think he expected the paper to be suppressed earlier than it was. What actually happened was that, after some confusion (during

[1] This was one of the many facts of which Mr Beverley Nichols was apparently unaware. 'And why, if there were even the faintest shadow of opposition to the [Moslem] League in the Muslim ranks . . . why, oh why is even Congress unaware of its existence? . . . It is because the League *is* Muslim India. There are no discordant voices . . .' When Mr Nichols wrote this in his *Verdict* he had, on his own admission, met Abdul Ghaffar Khan, whom he described as 'Gandhi's understudy on the North-West Frontier.' Apparently he did not realise that Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his Pathan followers were Moslems; which is curious.

[2] Abdul Ghaffar Khan was interned without trial. Objectionable as this practice undoubtedly is, it would be unfair to the Pakistan Government not to point out that the present rulers of India also detain people without trial – though such detentions were frequently, and very rightly, condemned by Indians when the British rulers had recourse to them.

which Pyaralal turned up, but declined the honour), I found myself with two bosses on the spot and a third – the new nominal editor[1] – lying at Karachi with a bullet wound in his thigh. (He had been shot by the police, while trying to pacify a crowd.)

Meanwhile my own health was deteriorating; and I was worried by the prospect of becoming a drag on my friends instead of being any help to them. I thought increasingly of what I might be able to do in England to counteract the propaganda of the press and the Labour Government. Even the most liberally-minded people seemed to be hopelessly ill-informed, many of my own Quaker friends (who read the Viceroy's words, but could not see his actions) being under the impression that Lord Irwin was showing what they called 'the spirit of forbearance and conciliation'. Indian comment on such curious misconceptions might have been summed up in the lines:

It's all very well to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me downstairs?

I was determined to get to grips with opinion in Britain, and began to make plans for my return.

Before I left Sabarmati I visited Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel in the local jail. Like Gandhi, they talked of prison as a place of rest and peace – the only rest they ever had. My old friend Abbas Tyabji (he was seventy-six) was among the next to be arrested, with a batch of fifty-seven followers, mostly old friends of mine from the *ashram*. He had been threatened with the loss of his pension from Baroda State, as a retired Chief Justice – I do not know whether he did lose it, but he was cheerful enough at the prospect. From Dholera came the news of 30,000 people breaking the salt laws on one day, and the women were playing an increasing part in the struggle. 'This campaign,' a friend remarked to me, 'will strike a mortal blow at *purdah*, if it does nothing else.' A number of these women were charged by mounted police on one occasion and beaten with *lathis* and rifles. The explanation of the Director of Information was that 'the horses got out of control'. He neglected to explain how the *lathis* and rifles proved equally uncontrollable. An official denial in another case (at Agra) that there had been a baton charge on

[1] Many Indian papers in those days had a 'jail editor' in addition to the real one. The 'jail editor' took all responsibility and went to prison in the event of a prosecution, when he was succeeded by another 'jail editor.' This would give the journal some continuity and a slightly longer expectation of life.

women proved, on enquiry, to be based upon a neat technical distinction between a baton and a *lathi* – the stick carried by an Indian policeman.

It would be possible to fill several books with such incidents, including the many cases where the police opened fire; but fortunately this is all part of the dead past. I mention these examples now merely because such incidents, and official prevarication with regard to them, helped me to decide on my next move. Somehow I had to cut through this intricate tangle of falsehood; and at Sabarmati I felt powerless to deal with the reports appearing in British papers. Even today it may be worth recalling that continual conflict between facts and the official reports regarding them. Nowadays, I never read a Government statement or a Fleet Street report of a 'riot' in some part of Africa without the same query inevitably coming into my mind: 'What is the truth behind all this?' When one considers how few events that one has witnessed – even in England, and including occasions of no political importance – have been correctly reported in the press, it ought to make one very sceptical. I can safely say that I have never yet seen a correct newspaper account of anything that I have ever witnessed – not even of a garden party. How much less reliable must the press be when it is dealing with distant events of which the reader has no direct knowledge and the writer, too often, every strong inducement to distort or suppress facts for political reasons?

None of Gandhi's *satyagrahis* would go to law – it was a strict rule that they should boycott and ignore the courts; and even when prosecuted they made no defence. Consequently there were no prosecutions for assault or for libel, though every day gave scope for both.

Refusal of land tax was begun in Bardoli while I was still at the *ashram*. My personal news at the end of May was mainly of the impossibility of co-operating with a new Acting Editor of *Young India*, whose authority had eventually been established after much argument. He was a man whom I have since learnt to respect; but as he is still considered a difficult person to work with, I may have had good reason for my criticisms of him. I also recorded sadly that 'since the heat became really intense I have had to give up manual labour in the fields'. During my last week at the *ashram* three N.C.O.s from the cantonment visited me, following the example of the officers and the chaplain. I liked the sergeant-major ('a pleasant

young fellow with a familiar Midland twang on his tongue, mild blue eyes and unassuming manners – not a bit like the sergeant-majors of song and story'). I showed the N.C.O.s round and noted that 'they asked many questions and seemed impressed with what they saw and heard'. They persuaded me to return with them, and I spent the evening in the N.C.O.'s Mess, and answering questions and discoursing on Gandhi to a highly respectful audience of sergeants and corporals, who nodded solemnly as they sipped their beer.

I left on May 25th, all the *ashramites* being convened specially to see me off. 'I had been looking forward,' I wrote, 'to resuming my travels; but when the moment came I felt very sad. They made the sacred mark on my forehead and garlanded me with yarn spun by Bapu on his march. . . . They wanted me to speak to them, but I could not. I think they understood. They were all standing in the road as the *tonga* rattled me round the first bend, with *Bande Mataram* . . . still ringing in my ears.'

My immediate destination was Bombay, and I had arranged to travel with a batch of Congress volunteers who were on their way to Dharasana (one of the storm-centres). Their route lay for some distance along the main line to Bombay and their leader was one of my friends. So I went first to the Congress headquarters at Ahmedabad, marching from there with the volunteers in a sort of procession to the station. Not since Gandhi set off from Sabarmati had I seen such dense crowds as those which turned out to cheer us on our way. As at Lahore, in the Congress procession, even the roofs were crowded. The police, fortunately, kept out of the way, so everything went peacefully. Congress volunteers along the road managed to control everything except the dust, which choked and blinded one. There seemed to be no air in the narrow streets, and I was almost overpowered by the heat and the smell.

About half an hour after we had boarded the night train it made an unscheduled stop. In spite of the usual discomfort I was half asleep, from sheer exhaustion; but the word 'police' roused me instantly to full consciousness. Sure enough, there they were, led by a self-important little man who was arresting all my companions. This was a new game – arresting volunteers before they had even begun to break any laws. They wanted him to show his warrant. He turned purple. 'Warrant?' he shouted. 'What are you talking about? I'm the D.S.P.' There was more shouting and confusion. Police began entering the carriages and hurling the occupants on

to the platform. They asked where I was going to. 'Bombay,' I replied.

The police left me alone after that. There was a great deal of conversation in Gujerati, after which the volunteers began to leave the carriages without the assistance of the D.S.P.'s minions. When I asked what had happened I was told that he had declared the occupants of those carriages an 'illegal assembly', and was arresting them as such. It was a hasty improvisation to cover his lack of a warrant, and the procedure was still quite illegal. In law he should have told an 'illegal assembly' to disperse, and was only empowered to arrest people if they refused to do so. But he gave me my cue. After a few moments' thought I jumped out of the train.

'Is it true,' I asked the D.S.P., 'that you are arresting the occupants of this carriage as an illegal assembly?'

'Yes.'

'Then you will have to arrest me, too.'

'Very well, then, I will,' cried the little man. The volunteers cheered.

He thought again and snapped at me: 'Are you going to Dharasana?'

'Where I am going,' I pointed out, 'has nothing to do with the question.'

For a moment he seemed quite at a loss. Then he came back with a singularly silly question.

'Did you get into this carriage by accident, then?'

'I don't generally,' said I, patiently, 'get into a carriage by accident.'

At that point some colleague – of higher rank, I presume – intervened.

'Mr Reynolds can go,' he said.

He spoke as though that ended the matter; as, in fact, it did. The stupidity of the whole business suddenly undermined my self-control, and I exclaimed:

'It's the biggest damn' farce I've seen!'

'What?' shrieked the D.S.P. 'Who are you calling a damned farce?'

'I'm not calling anybody anything,' I answered wearily (feeling that I should very much like to have called him a good many things). 'I'm only saying that this business is a damnable farce.'

So they arrested all my companions and I shook hands with the

friend who was leading them, before I returned to the empty carriage. 'It's honour bought cheap,' he said, and laughed. I never saw him again.

At every station crowds were waiting to welcome the volunteers and I had to explain that they had been arrested. As on the return journey from Dholera, I received the garlands intended for others. Owing to the crowds at Ahmedabad station I had been unable to obtain a ticket, but an Indian stranger who had entered my carriage on the journey paid the Inspector before I could get my money out. He resented as an insult my attempt to repay him, saying it was the least he could do to show his appreciation of a friend of his country. It was one of many similar experiences.

I slept little, if at all, that night and saw one of the strangest dawns I can remember. Across a dreary, barren waste of flat land a ridge of hills rose abruptly, pitch black against a ghastly yellow sky. Over the hills hung a bank of black cloud. A few stunted palms in the foreground only added to the air of desolation. There was something apocalyptic about that scene which appealed to my mood at the moment and remained permanently in my memory. It was Nature imitating Nemesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

. . . in lowring Hindostan
Rose, like its destiny, the fated man:
The scattered wars receive an altered form,
And heaven's full signs foretell the final storm.

ERNEST JONES (*about* 1849)

I WAS now on my way home, via Colombo. This route gave me an opportunity to see a little of Southern India, with the advantage of a cheap (third class) passage on the Orient Line.

In Bombay I stayed with Moslems again, on Malabar Hill. My host was a retired judge, a brother of Abbas Tyabji. Both brothers had been brought up to support British rule and had eventually turned against it, becoming strong supporters of Congress. Old Husain Tyabji and his legal friends astonished me by the unconcerned, matter-of-fact way in which they discussed the bribes said to have been received by a former British Governor of Bombay Presidency. In India today one still hears very similar discussions about prominent politicians and officials, and it is very difficult to arrive at any conclusions. On the whole I was, perhaps, more sceptical on my second visit to India because I felt that charges could, and should, have been substantiated in the courts. Before India became independent there were obvious difficulties about this – such as the bias of the courts and the sacrosanct character of a Governor who (being a representative of the King) could 'do no wrong' and could not be sued. A prominent Congressman had, however, publicly made a number of charges which had provoked a libel suit – and had won his case. The same technique was then being used to expose the Maharajah of Patiala (the father of the present ruler), who was quite the most criminal of the Indian Princes. Unfortunately he was too well advised to prosecute for libel, or to take action under the Princes' Protection Act.[1] He was saved from disaster by the

[1] In the first two editions of my *White Sahibs in India* there will be found an appendix on Patiala and on the discreditable means used by the Government in 1930 to cover his tracks. It is far too long a story to discuss here, but it is worth mentioning as one of the subjects to which I devoted considerable time on my return to England.

shrewdness of his Political Secretary, Mr Rushbrook Williams, and the venality of the Labour Government.

Bombay, seen from the steep slopes of Malabar Hill, did not much resemble the place that had so horrified me when I first arrived in India. Of an evening I would look down from a balcony, over the tops of trees, to the long sweep of distant lights that marked the curve of the bay. On the hill we did not even know of a riot in the city, until it was all over. It had broken out on the day of my arrival, in the Mohammedan quarter – the police had fired on some Moslems and the Moslems had thrown stones at the police. As to who began, or why, there were the usual conflicting accounts, that of the Government communiqué being based on the sole testimony of a British police sergeant, against a large number of Indian witnesses. This sergeant was later dismissed from the force – apparently because it was considered a blunder to quarrel with Moslems: it was certainly against Government policy.

Congress workers had hurried to the spot, pacified the people and taken care of the wounded. A wealthy Congressman had opened his house as a hospital, which I visited shortly afterwards. There I found many high-caste Hindus among those caring for the wounded Moslems. A number of casualties from Dharasana and other places were brought to this hospital – passive resisters who had experienced what was officially called 'minimum force' in the form of police *lathi* charges. The night in Bombay ended with the burning of a car from which the owner – an Englishman – was rescued by Congress workers. An open-air meeting was arranged by the Moslem nationalists on the following day; and with no more than a few hours' notice they collected a crowd of about 15,000. This, I was told, was only a small number, but many who would otherwise have been present were in a funeral procession for the victims of the riot. (Bodies are disposed of variously in India, according to different religious customs; but in one matter practice is uniform, and that is speed. The climate is conducive to rapid putrefaction.)

I was asked to go on the platform at this meeting and suddenly confronted with an unexpected request to speak. It was my first experience of talking into a microphone, and a wind from the sea blew my own words back from the loudspeakers, almost deafening and quite confusing me. I spoke in English, and a translation was given afterwards.

My time in Bombay seems to have been spent mainly in meeting

people – everybody from Congress leaders (including members of that distinguished Parsee family, the Naorojis) to American movie-men, who persuaded me to give a 'message' before the microphone and the camera. I cannot think (and shudder to imagine) what non-sense I talked. One well-known Moslem I was particularly glad to meet was Brelvi, editor of the leading nationalist daily paper, the *Bombay Chronicle*. I liked him, but found him too 'desperately afraid of having his paper suppressed'. He did, however, publish my account of the arrests on the train – an article which made the best of a ludicrous situation and might well have caused trouble for any editor. ('Calculated to bring the Government into hatred and con-tempt' was a very common charge in relation to such articles in the daily routine of trials and convictions.) Two years later Brelvi did land himself into serious trouble by publishing the investigations made by Verrier Elwin regarding the repression of the Pathans on the North-West Frontier.

Gandhiji was now at Yeravda Prison, Poona, which was on my route to Madras. He had written on May 22nd asking me to visit him and I planned to make Poona my next stop, staying for a few days at the *Christa Seva Sangha*. This place was one of the very few Christian *ashrams* (High Anglican) and I was going there at the invitation of Verrier Elwin – Father Elwin, as he was called in those days – a man whom I had not yet met, though I had read a few things he had written with strong approval. So at the end of May I left Bombay with one of Gandhi's nephews, a Parsee friend and Mirabehn. Gandhi's English disciple had met us, to our great sur-prise, on the platform of the station as we left Bombay. She had come down from Sabarmati with an urgent cable for me which had arrived from England – at the *ashram* they did not know my Bom-bay address, and the cable concerned my proposed interview with the celebrated prisoner at Yeravda. My journals are very inadequate at this point. (I had been vaccinated in Bombay, in accordance with the regulations of the Orient Line, and I was just beginning to feel the effects.) I *think* the cable was from C. F. Andrews, and concerned Gandhi's terms for calling off the Civil Disobedience Campaign; but I am not sure, nor do I know how it happened that whoever sent the cable knew so soon of my intended visit to Yeravda. There may have been a press rumour – correct, for once.

Anyway, there was Mirabehn, to my great delight – for I had said good-bye to her with the others at Sabarmati – and she had taken

the chance of finding me at the station, knowing the train by which Gandhi's nephew Mathurdas was travelling. Having come so far, she decided to travel with us in the hope of seeing Gandhiji. Two of us being far from well, we travelled second class; and I dimly remember the train winding and tunnelling through beautiful mountainous country. On arrival at Poona we drove straight from the station to the jail.

Mathurdas Gandhi had already arranged with the prison authorities regarding his visit. I had written a week before but received no reply. The other two had made no arrangements and merely hoped for the best. The position was that Bapu was not a convict but detained during the Government's 'pleasure', so that ordinary prison rules did not apply and visits were subject to the discretion or caprice of the Prison Governor – or whoever gave him his instructions. Mathurdas sent in a note and we waited in the sun for what seemed to me – with my mounting fever – an intolerably long time. Word came back that Mathurdas and Mirabehn could see Mr Gandhi, but not the other two (my Parsee friend and myself). The privileged two went in and asked Bapu what should be done in these circumstances. He replied that he could not countenance this discrimination, and that they were to go back unless we were all to be allowed in. Eventually we received word that the other three were to be admitted, but not Mr Reynolds. The Superintendent's note, which I still keep as a curio, stated that 'Mr Reynolds is informed that his request for an interview cannot be granted.'

I never fathomed what lay behind it – perhaps the news of that cable from England, though surely any other member of the party might still have acted on my behalf in the matter. The four of us withdrew, two having at least seen the dear man for a minute or two. A letter which I received two months later from a member of Gandhi's family stated that 'Bapu does not take interviews since you went to Yeravda' – from which I conclude that he had been refusing to see other visitors as a protest against my exclusion. Before I left Poona I was visited by an Associated Press reporter and for once I even welcomed a journalist when I found that he had come to confirm the Prison Superintendent's account of this incident. The Superintendent's story was simply that Gandhiji did not wish to see any of the four visitors who had called that day. This somewhat inaccurate version I managed to stop. It remained unpublished, and was replaced by a brief statement of my own.

From the jail we drove to the *Christa Seva Sangha*, where the others left me and returned to the station. At last I met Verrier Elwin, who was a very striking figure even in those days. He had not even begun to achieve fame as an anthropologist, but he was known to a small circle for his poetry, his wit and his charming personality – also for the courageous way in which he had often expressed his sympathy with Congress. He was very good-looking, and in his white *khaddar* cassock gave an impression of having stepped straight off the streets of gold through one of those gates of pearl. Not until he laughed – which was fortunately almost at once – could I be quite convinced that he was human. In the absence of Father Jack Winslow, Verrier was in charge of the *ashram;* and even two days of high temperature and torment (when my bowels, like those of Job, 'boiled and rested not') did not prevent me from remembering my short stay at the *Christa Seva Sangha* as one of the happiest episodes during my time in India. I lived once more in a stone cell, where for forty-eight hours I fasted (until something resembling normal conditions were restored) entertained by Verrier's drolleries and visits from other Brothers of the small community. The place was dedicated to St Francis; and I don't know whether to call it 'pure Franciscan', but it was certainly pure Laurence Housman – which may be higher praise, for I always suspected my oldest literary friend of having improved on his original in those delightful plays. Much of the life of this Christian *ashram* had been borrowed from Hindu culture; but I am sure no Hindu institution ever enjoyed so much laughter.

I don't know how High Anglicans 'manage' about Holy Water, but these friends at Poona used it, and preserved it with contraband salt. They were doing a great deal of social work in neighbouring villages, about which they told me. Some time after I left Poona one of these Brothers was assaulted in the road by a British officer from the cantonment – apparently because he was wearing *khaddar*. No action was taken. With Verrier I discussed the matter that was uppermost in my mind – the problem of counteracting Government propaganda in Britain. This had become even more difficult from the Indian end owing to the frequent interference with mails (in spite of the usual glib denial by Wedgwood Benn in the House of Commons). Verrier was one of many who had reason to complain of this unacknowledged censorship. My journals also record at least one 'Elwinism' apropos of a British Quaker who had been pouring

out entirely fictitious information and figures about India faster than I could hope to reply, even when I was allowed to do so.[1] 'He mentioned X——,' I wrote, 'whom he had met in London. I referred to our Friend's statistical inaccuracies. "Ah," said Verrier, "I thought he was no statistician when I found he had dismissed the Trinity in a footnote."'

There must have been something more than vaccination behind that fever in Poona, for I remained in very poor health during those last weeks in India. My final entries were those of a very tired and sick young man who was finding how distressing notoriety could be in such circumstances. However, nothing of special importance happened on the train to Madras, except that we ran over a buffalo and a whole village turned out to lament the catastrophe. With Bombay and Poona I left behind the *gulmohur* (the most beautiful tree, to my mind, that I had ever seen) with its flame-coloured blossoms. I came to a land, as it seemed, of palm trees and bananas.

My host at Madras was Dr Gravely, the Superintendent of the Museum. I noted as a matter of some interest that I had paid four and a half times the normal rate to wire him, because it was the King-Emperor's birthday. (On the lesser festival known as Easter Monday I had only been made to pay double.) Dr Gravely, a Quaker whose family had known my father, was very kind to me. He was an excellent host and on the best of terms with everybody, including the local Congress people – a thing which was then rare among Englishmen, especially those in official positions. So far as my health and weariness permitted I was taken around to meet people, and was interested to find the carpenter's shop at the Ramakrishna Mission busy turning out spinning-wheels to meet the growing demand for them. The local Congress people were somewhat divided, and some of the leaders had been accused of timidity. As a result, a number of women had come to the fore, and they had sent *saris* and bangles to the less intrepid leaders by way of a hint.

At first I managed to dodge the press, safe in the Museum and in my host's house, but before I left Madras they were on my trail again. My next stop was at Madura. I left Madras in the evening, but

[1] *The Friend* – the Quaker weekly in which most of this fiction appeared – has long been in better hands. But it was then edited by a cousin of mine, who allowed the most outrageous libels on Indians in general, and Gandhi in particular, seldom permitting any attempt to correct them, even when it was a matter of official statistics of which there could be only one correct version. Fortunately, the attitude of the Society of Friends towards India and Gandhi was soon to be completely revolutionised.

after a night's journey I still had some hours of travelling before my arrival at noon on the following day, and I was not fortunate in my company. A Cockney (who turned out to be an Army baker on leave) and another Englishman, in the Criminal Investigation Department, boarded my train that morning. 'They gave me to understand,' I wrote, 'that they knew who I was and forthwith began to abuse Bapu and the *satyagrahis* in filthy language. However, I continued to read *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*, I think to their disappointment and annoyance.' At one station, where I breakfasted off a bunch of bananas, a monkey mother, clutching her infant, came through the window. With amazing speed she snatched my last banana (almost from my hand) and ran off with it, eating the stolen fruit a few feet from where I was sitting.

At Madura I was met by Dick Keithahn, a young American missionary with whom I had made acquaintance – I think on a visit of his to Sabarmati. He rescued me from pressmen and *Congress-wallahs*, taking me off in his Ford. Keithahn – like his fellow-countryman, Richard Gregg, the Brothers at Poona, and myself – wore *khaddar*, a very rare thing indeed among Europeans. Dr Forrester Paton, a Scottish missionary, was another of this small band; and in 1932 Dr Paton's hand-spun clothing was considered sufficient provocation for two British police sergeants to attack him with *lathis*.

Paton's case, in fact, became quite a *cause célèbre*. Having beaten him up as he was walking along a street in Madras, the police called a water-cart and had him drenched with green water from a hose-pipe, after which he was arrested on fabricated charges and a prosecution was begun which had to be dropped for lack of any evidence.[1] Another European who wore *khaddar* was, of course, Mirabehn; and though she was not persecuted for wearing it she was apparently considered an undesirable character for assisting in its manufacture. When she was externed from Bombay in 1932 the *Daily Telegraph* (February 17th) solemnly listed her offences: 'She

[1] A full account of this incident appeared in a Christian journal, the *Guardian* (then published in Calcutta) of February 4th, 1932. Dr Paton happened to have a brother-in-law who was a Conservative M.P., and this case consequently had some publicity. Sir Samuel Hoare – then at the India Office – wrote to the indignant M.P. that 'a mistake had been made'. It had, indeed. It is always a mistake to assault people with respectable friends in Parliament; but the Indian villagers had no such protection and (according to Dr Paton) were afraid to go into town in homespun. It was not considered a mistake when they were similarly treated.

has acted in a manner prejudicial to public safety in furthering an unlawful movement. Miss Slade has spent the greater part of her time, since the arrest of Gandhi, in spinning [*sic*] cloth.'

The wearing of *khaddar* was therefore a badge of brotherhood that really meant something in those days. Keithahn was strictly law-abiding – his pledge of political neutrality (demanded of him as an American citizen) had never been dishonoured. But there was no doubt, in private conversation, as to what he really thought about things: his clothes, indeed, proclaimed his opinions. Nevertheless, he contended that supporting village industries was legitimate; and how, indeed, could anyone argue that it constituted political partiality? No British official would have considered that Keithahn was taking sides had he worn foreign cloth, which was their own 'badge'. Nevertheless, he had been warned by the Collector.[1] He told me of another member of his American mission who had been rash enough to tell the Collector's wife that he thought Gandhi was sincere. For this terrible statement the missionary had been given to understand by the Collector that when next he went home on leave he would not be permitted to return to India.

'I should think,' I wrote in my journal, 'that my visit will constitute almost a penal offence.' I was not far wrong. For giving me one night's hospitality and inviting some of his friends (Indian Christians) to meet me on the roof of his house (a private gathering later described officially as a 'political meeting') Keithahn was kicked out of India.

This case was to be made the subject of a question in the House of Commons by a man then unknown to me – Wilfred Wellock – who asked Wedgwood Benn whether he was aware that Keithahn's 'only offence was to give shelter for one night to an Englishman'. Benn replied that he was 'making enquiries' and there – so far as the House was concerned – the matter ended (*Hansard*, July 28th, 1930). Subsequently there was some controversy about Keithahn in the *Spectator*. A correspondent (Horace Alexander) stated that he had been through the file of the National Christian Council relating to this matter. 'The more I read,' he said, 'the more astonished I became that such a thing could have happened. No complaint was made against Mr Keithahn whatever, except that he had entertained Mr Reynolds and had been present at the station to see him off (a

[1] My journal contains other references to this persecution of *khaddar*. Even the distribution centres were sometimes wrecked by the police.

courtesy not unusual towards one's guests) when there was also a Congress demonstration in Mr Reynolds' honour.' Horace Alexander, in this letter, mentioned that another of my hosts – easily identified as Verrier Elwin, from whom I later heard the full story – had been questioned about me. The official who addressed this enquiry ('thinking, apparently,' wrote Alexander, 'that the unexpectedly easy triumph over these missionaries might be profitably followed up') was silenced by Verrier's reply that he would sooner die that allow any authority to dictate to him in matters of hospitality.[1]

I had to intervene myself in that discussion, as Dr Edward Thompson – a man for whom I had the greatest respect – had suddenly come forward as *advocatus diaboli*, for some obscure reason, and attempted to justify the Government by suggesting that Madura was 'off my beat', as though I had been a perambulating policeman. There was no further reply to the letters by Horace Alexander and myself which did, in fact, clinch an irrefutable case. And I am happy to add that Edward Thompson and I had a good laugh about the whole thing many years later; for we became friends before a tragic illness ended the life of that most erratic, sincere and lovable man. I admired him as a scholar, a poet and a real friend of India.

Keithahn himself, to whom I naturally wrote in apology when I learned the result of my visit, replied that had he not been compelled to leave on account of his hospitality to me he would still have been forced to resign two weeks later, when the Collector (a certain Mr Hull) sent out requests that missionaries should uphold the Government and speak against the nationalist movement in any informal gatherings at which they might find themselves. Much to his disgust, the American group with which Keithahn had been working took this request without protest; but a Danish missionary, engaged in work which received a Government grant, had resigned from his post and protested against the circular. Keithahn himself eventually returned to India, and was among the old friends who welcomed me in 1949. But I must go back to June, 1930.

The famous Shiva temple at Madura I found hideously over-ornamented. Half of it seemed to be in use as a bazaar – a den of thieves, also of beggars. Lit up at dusk by hundreds of tiny lamps, it looked better; but on the whole I much preferred the old palace of the rajahs, then used as law courts. It was good to see columns with

[1] *Spectator*, December 6th, 1930.

unbroken lines. Generally speaking, however, the architecture of the South repelled me owing to its superfluity of decoration, obscuring all sense of form.

On the way out to Keithahn's house at Pasumlai I noticed a mosque, perched on a high rock. It looked so solitary, remote and quiet that I had a great desire to visit it. So we rose early the next morning to make the climb while the day was still cool. We found an aged Imam at the mosque when we reached it, and asked his permission to enter. He replied that there was but one God, Allah – evidently an adequate answer in his opinion, and we took it as an invitation to enter. Like most mosques, it impressed me – Moslem architecture seemed to me to have so much more grandeur, and I liked its comparative simplicity. It has, of course, an affinity with some European styles, which Hindu architecture has not, and is so much more easily appreciated, in consequence, by the average Westerner. In this matter I was (and still am) a fair specimen of that average.

Before I left for Ceylon I was kidnapped, more or less, by the local Congress chiefs and taken off to their centre at Madura, where I had to sit and answer questions (always the *same* questions, to which I became so tired of replying). There were also the same embarrassing compliments, and there was the same inevitable garlanding and cheering. I breakfasted at last with an Indian friend – a Civil Engineer – but found the same crowd which had gathered round the doors at the Congress centre waiting to see me off at the station. The whole business seems to have been getting me down and my journals record the exhausting delay at the station, due to the train being late and remaining so long when it eventually arrived. All this time I had to talk pleasantly with my well-meaning friends when 'my whole idea of happiness was a haystack on Mount Everest'.

Six hours later I was on a boat, crossing the narrow seas between India and Ceylon. Thanks to the crowd at Madura, I had not a hope of travelling *incognito*. Everywhere I moved on that boat there was nudging and whispering. Regret and relief were curiously mingled as I watched India slip out of sight. I wondered if I should ever return. But my adventures were by no means at an end. At Talainannar Pier the Customs examination of my personal papers held up everything else and considerably delayed the boat train. My private letters were read and all books and papers closely scrutinised. Fortunately

my very cryptic method of taking notes is meaningless to anybody but myself, so nothing of any great interest to the authorities was discovered. They took away my passport and told me that I could recover it the next day at the C.I.D. office in Colombo.

An all-night journey in a crowded train brought me to the capital – or, at least, to one of the outlying suburbs. I had hoped to spend a quiet day and night before leaving for England, at the Y.M.C.A. – specially recommended by Keithahn on account of its Warden, whom I later discovered to be indeed a *sympathique* character. But at the last station before Colombo I was almost carried out of the train by some Indian Congressmen who had made very different arrangements for me. Helpless to resist, I let them take me into Colombo by car.

I had not realised until then that about one-fifth of the population of Ceylon consisted of Tamils – immigrants from Southern India. It was one of these, a member of the Ceylon Legislative Council, who had taken charge of me, and it was to his house that we now drove. I was immediately besieged by Indians, including many journalists, and submitted to all the questions and compliments which I thought I had left behind for ever – with pressure from my host to make statements for the press on the grounds that the opportunity for propaganda must not be lost. In the middle of all this I was shown a handbill announcing that I was to address a public meeting that afternoon on the political situation in India. In vain did I plead the state of my health and the strong reasons that I had for wishing to avoid trouble for myself in Ceylon. It was, I considered, 'obvious that any speech I could make on this subject was bound to be rankly seditious in the eyes of the Government' – no wonder, as the chief purpose of the meeting was to raise money and recruits for the Civil Disobedience Campaign in India. Writing later on the *Orsova*, homeward bound, I said:

> I was particularly averse to giving the police any excuse for arresting me now that my plans were made and my passage booked. I have since learned how far my fears were justified – at least the story goes on board here that I was within an inch of being arrested in Colombo.
>
> But my protests were unavailing. My visit to Ceylon had been rumoured for some days, something of this sort was expected of me, and the matter was an affair of *noblesse oblige*. My host told me that the political apathy of the island was disgraceful and that

he relied on me to make a stir. I hope he is satisfied with the 'stir' I created.

Well, there were more flags and garlands and cheering crowds and everything I have come to hate, and finally I landed back at Natesa Aiyar's house with a double-barrelled headache and a host of new friends who crowded into the place after the amiable fashion of the Orient. Among them was a partner in an Indian shipping firm who mercifully carried me off in his car to his house, well away outside the town. It was close to the shore and he gave me a room facing the sea. The murmur of waves was never so soothing.

Unfortunately it was necessary to revisit the town before I embarked the following evening. Photographs had appeared in all the newspapers, and although all my business was of a purely private character – such as the collection of my passport from the C.I.D. and a short visit to the Y.M.C.A., where I met Keithahn's friend – crowds collected everywhere I went. At last my kind host of the previous night put me on board the *Orsova* in his company's motor launch. Many passengers who had been on shore had bought newspapers and – apart from seeing the photographs – had read accounts of my adventures (varying in accuracy) together with interviews, a résumé of my speech the previous evening, and the news that I was sailing on the *Orsova*. This was not conducive to the peaceful anonymity I had promised myself for the voyage; but after the first flutter of curiosity I was left alone a good deal. In fact I made it very clear from the start that I had no wish to discuss either politics or my own affairs with anybody; and I soon settled down to write articles on various aspects of the Indian political situation. But first I watched the lights of Colombo till they had disappeared. I was mentally numbed and very apathetic as I said good-bye to the East.

The monsoons really brought me back to life. In wind and rain I paced the rolling deck, feeling that at last I could breathe again. The lost energy returned, and I set about vigorously the many jobs I had determined to tackle on the voyage. In less than three weeks I was back in England, ready for a fresh campaign with new companions.

* * *

As I am – most fortunately – not writing an autobiography, the story of my own life from July, 1930, until I sailed again for India in

October, 1949, is mainly irrelevant to my present purpose. A few things only need be mentioned.

In England I found many old friends anxious to help and new ones to whom I was drawn by a common interest. Until Indian freedom was achieved it remained my principal concern; and the first book that I ever wrote, in 1937, was one result of this preoccupation. *The White Sahibs in India* was, perhaps, my own most effective contribution to 'The Cause'; and I do know now that it made a number of people really think seriously about India for the first time, on their own admission – though I too have an admission to make, which is that the book had many faults. One's earlier works always have. It was, of course, banned in India; but in Britain it sold well enough, going into a second edition in 1938. It was also republished in an abridged and revised form after the war. Perhaps its most curious – and (to me) unpleasant – adventure was the way in which it was plagiarised in a big way in France under the German occupation. Under the title *L'Inde et l'Angleterre*, with the name of Robert Briffault as author, a book was published which – apart from the last chapter – was little more than a French pot-boiler rehashed from my *White Sahibs*. There were frequent acknowledgments to my own book, but the numerous quotations and references which were not so acknowledged had all been, quite obviously, 'lifted' – unless one allows for an extraordinary degree of coincidence, even in the matter of press cuttings from British and Indian papers over a long period.

I do not mention this matter merely on account of the plagiarism. In normal times I suppose my publishers would have dealt with that as they thought best. But the last chapter of *L'Inde et l'Angleterre* covered the war years – a period subsequent to the publication of my own book in 1937 and 1938. This last chapter openly favoured the Japanese 'liberators' of Asia; so that, in effect, my own work was adapted to a very different purpose from that which I had intended. I did not know about this until after the war, when a copy of the French book was given to me as a curiosity by somebody who had already noticed the extensive use of my historical material. This use of it for what was, quite blatantly, Nazi propaganda – carried out under German occupation and in German interests – naturally annoyed but did not greatly surprise me. I had always realised that any exposure of our own crimes and blunders was liable to be used in this way – just as the exposure of Nazi crimes could be used (and was, in fact, used) to further the interests of British Imperialism and

Russian Communism. There is no safeguard against distortion of one's words except silence; and such silence, whilst it safeguards the individual in this sense, protects at the same time the abuses he dare not mention. Even with *L'Inde et l'Angleterre* lying before me as I write, I still cannot regret for one moment the work upon which it was based.

It is impossible, of course, to evaluate such work, and I shall never know how many or how few people I helped to influence with regard to India. Much clearer in my own mind is the knowledge that my interest in India brought me into touch with some of the finest people I have ever met, including names that were already almost legendary, the Old Campaigners of previous struggles. Quite suddenly I found myself working with people whose names my father had mentioned with approval in my early childhood. To speak on the same platform, for example, as Mrs Charlotte Despard was an unforgettable experience which linked one up with a sort of Apostolic Succession of Radicals.

On one occasion, I remember, old Henry Nevinson looked round the room and said to Laurence Housman: 'It's the same old crowd; the people who opposed the Boer War, the people who stood up for Ireland, the people who backed Women's Suffrage and all the unpopular causes. *It's the Stage Army of the Good!*' That sardonic humour was typical of Nevinson; but behind it, I think, was a kind of pride. As a very raw recruit in the 'Stage Army' I, at least, was proud to be in such company. (Incidentally, old Nevinson was very good to have associated himself with us at all on the Indian issue – it was force of habit rather than conviction, for he was distinctly woolly himself about India and had even reviewed the stillborn Simon Report, in the *New Leader*, as a 'revolutionary document'. But he couldn't see the old gang move into action again without wanting to give them at least his blessing.)

Among my souvenirs of those times I have four letters from Romain Rolland, like so many bugle calls in the days when I was beginning to feel disillusioned and depressed. Only recently I came across a newspaper article in which Madame Rolland had published extracts from her husband's journals; and I found to my surprise that she had selected references to our correspondence in 1930. The warm and kindly way in which Rolland wrote in his diary about the young Englishman whom he had never met confirmed my conviction as to the personal value of any struggle for freedom – the

value to those who participate in it. Reflected glory is only ridiculous when we mistake it for our own; for to live and work with greater and better people than oneself is (to my mind) a legitimate source of happiness and even of pride – the pride of having been accepted into their company. In one letter Rolland himself gave a very practical twist to this same thought, when he spoke of the Great Soul of India. '*Vous en porterez*,' he wrote, '*toute votre vie, le reflet d'auréole sur vous. Transmettez-le! C'est votre lot.*' Such 'reflected glory' is not a borrowed halo but a responsibility – something you have been privileged to realise at first hand and must impart, as well as you can, to others. Curiously enough it was Romain Rolland who sent Mirabehn to Gandhi, whilst in my case it was the association with Gandhi which brought me into touch with Rolland. I wish, indeed, that I could adequately 'reflect the glory' of both these men.

To Gandhi himself I wrote very seldom, only when there was some matter of real importance which seemed to justify taking any of his time – and, wherever possible, I told him that no reply was expected. To have acted otherwise after what I had seen of his life (and particularly of his correspondence) would have been unpardonable. But one of the exceptional occasions occurred in 1931 when the 'Gandhi-Irwin Pact' was signed and Civil Disobedience suspended. Gandhiji, I suddenly heard, was to come to the Round Table Conference after all. Once he had stood out for what he called 'a Square Table Conference, where we know where we are' – such a conference, in fact, as would have resulted from the fulfilment of his original terms in 1929. That he should now be prepared to attend the conference on any other terms bewildered and distressed me. So did the cessation of Civil Disobedience.

As soon as negotiations were reopened with the Government, I wrote. It was not, as it might appear, impertinent interference. I had a perfectly legitimate motive, which was that – as one of the few exponents of the Congress case in Britain – I ought to know just where they stood. It was of vital importance to me that I should understand the reasons for this change of front if I was to continue writing and speaking in defence of India and her leaders. Gandhiji's reply to this first letter was written from Delhi on February 23rd, 1931. It was much longer than most of his letters to me, and typed. (Most of the letters I had from him were in his own hand or – very rarely – dictated to an amanuensis.) The old man said he honoured me for my 'long, frank and emphatic letter', but after this and some

other kind remarks he went on to say that he completely disagreed with me, giving his reasons.

I was not in any way entitled to such an explanation, but it was typical of Gandhiji that he found time to offer it. Others who wrote to him with queries or criticisms at different times in his life invariably had the same experience. Bapu asked me to 'remember . . . that *Satyagraha* is a method of carrying conviction and of converting by an appeal to reason and to the sympathetic chord in human beings. It relies upon the ultimate good in every human being'. This I could appreciate – but I still could not see that it explained the change of policy. However, the letter invited further criticism if I was not convinced. 'If this does not satisfy you,' he wrote, 'do by all means strive with me. You are entitled to do so . . .' There followed words of appreciation and encouragement, referring to my efforts to present the Indian case in Britain.

The political part of my second long letter in this controversy was published in *Young India* (April 16th, 1931) together with Gandhiji's reply. This again was typical – the courteous gift of publicity to views which were in conflict with his own. At the same time he wrote from Sabarmati to tell me of the way in which he had used my letter. I was still only twenty-five, and my support or opposition at any time could have made no difference to him. Yet he wrote, because each individual person meant so much to him: 'Don't therefore desert the cause or give me up.' Of all the things he ever said or wrote to me, those words move me most because of the value that he clearly placed on personal friendship. And then, because I must have mentioned other and more personal problems, he added: 'But I am more concerned with your personal references than with your spirited attack. . . . If you are not at peace with yourself there, will you not come here? You know that the *ashram* is your second home.'

It was the second time that he had used such an expression about my 'home' at Sabarmati, and they were words which I was to recall with deep emotion when I eventually accepted the invitation. For I went to India in 1949 with the feeling of keeping an appointment, and kept it on the patch of sand above the river, the prayer-ground of the *Satyagrahashram*. . . . However, we were to meet again before Gandhi's death – not at Sabarmati but in England; for in 1931 he arrived to attend the Round Table Conference. Still politically unconvinced, I was nevertheless delighted at the opportunity of seeing him again.

The full story of how I managed to meet him on his arrival must be told elsewhere, for it is concerned with the very pleasant relationship which I had established with the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. In my dealings with the detectives who used to follow me about on my return from India I had adopted Gandhi's own methods.[1] It is one of the few matters in which I can claim to have followed them faithfully, and it worked wonders. It also gave me great amusement and provided me with quite a good story for one of my broadcast talks on my recent visit to India.

But all I need say here is that I was the first to board the boat when Bapu arrived – or rather, the first after a detective-inspector who submitted a list of those waiting on the quay. I was there with John Haynes Holmes, then editor of a Chicago paper called *Unity*, and neither of us had the Home Office permit which was supposed to be necessary in order to pass the police cordon – that was where I cashed in on past courtesy shown to the sleuths of the Yard, for they escorted us through the cordon. (For this purpose, two detectives even met us at the station.) When the inspector reappeared at the top of the gangway to call the names of those whom Gandhiji wished to see, my own name was called first. It is difficult not to feel pride at that memory, but the real credit goes to Gandhi, who put personal friendship before all the claims of M.P.s, Government officials, press representatives and others who were also waiting to speak with him. We were only allowed on board one at a time. He saw Holmes next and then – so far as I remember – Fenner Brockway. My American friend and I returned to town greatly elated.

During Gandhi's stay in London I saw him seldom – I was lecturing in Sussex for the Workers' Educational Association, and in any case he had far too many visitors without adding to them unnecessarily. But for the first few days I was at Kingsley Hall (where Bapu was staying with his son Devadas, Mahadev Desai, Pyaralal and Mirabehn). Here I was able to be of a little use in the early stages, until the workers at this East End settlement became accustomed to the requirements of their guests and to the 'Who's Who' of their visitors. In order to prevent Gandhiji from being over-

[1] Gandhi's methods and their success in this matter can best be illustrated by a story I heard in 1929. Gandhiji would always offer full details of his plans and movements to the police, thereby saving them a great deal of trouble. One police inspector who availed himself of Gandhi's courtesy in this matter is said to have been severely reprimanded by his Chief. 'Don't you know,' he told the inspector, 'that everyone who comes into close contact with that man *goes over to his side?*'

whelmed by callers we guarded the doors carefully; and in any case of doubt I was called in.

On one occasion I was urgently asked to come because an Indian woman was fighting her way up the stairs and refused to wait while her name was sent in to Gandhi. I ran to head her off and at the top of a flight of stairs I almost came into a head-on collision with Mrs Sarojini Naidu. The well-known Indian poet and politician was sweeping onwards shouting furiously at two men who were trying to restrain her, one on either side – or rather they appeared to be dragged in her wake, like a couple of dinghies towed by a square-rigged ship in a heavy squall. Breathless she paused to readjust her sails – I mean her *sari* – and then fired a broadside at all in sight. In vain I tried to reason with her, explaining the necessity for protecting Bapu and the difficulties of the doorkeepers, as yet unfamiliar with even such famous people as Mrs Naidu. . . . It appeared that she had never been treated so disgracefully. The lady had a reputation as a wit, but I think she must have lacked ordinary humour, a little of which would have preserved her temper on that occasion and saved us all from an embarrassing situation.

Bapu's next letter to me was written, he said, 'whilst I am sitting at the Conference'. It was a reply to another critical query relating to policy – justifying economic concessions which I had wrongly attributed to lack of firmness on his part. His letter made it clear that he did not offer these concessions from weakness, but out of sympathy for the British people, of whose economic problems he had learnt a good deal. He had been especially interested in the conditions of the Lancashire textile workers. It must have been hard for him, faced as he was by so much misrepresentation by his opponents, to be misunderstood by his friends also.

The night before Gandhi left England I was at the office in Knightsbridge which was used by his group, helping them pack books and papers. Repression had begun again in India, in defiance of the terms of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Gandhiji was going back to face a situation which would almost certainly lead to his imprisonment again – as, in fact, it did. But one little incident I recall with pleasure, and it concerned two of those very detectives with whom I had established such good relations on my return to England. These two men had been assigned the job of guarding Gandhi during his stay in this country, and he became very friendly with them. Indeed, on one occasion somebody pointed out a young girl

who was typing at the Knightsbridge office. 'That's Sergeant Evans's daughter,' I was told, 'and she's giving us voluntary help.' Delightful as it was, that, however, was not the incident I had in mind. It was Bapu's last request to Sir Samuel Hoare, with whom political relations were already strained to breaking point. But however much they might differ politically, there was no question of a personal quarrel on Gandhi's side; and he seems to have known how to obtain a human response even from a Cabinet Minister. So when Gandhiji asked if Sergeant Evans and his colleague could accompany him to Italy, as he had taken a liking to them, the request was granted. Each of these detectives received a watch as a souvenir of the strange little man for whom they had come to form such an affection and respect.

On a dull, grey morning he left London. Compared with the welcome he had received on his arrival, the few of us who were there to say good-bye made but a poor show. He stood at the carriage window, his palms pressed together in the familiar salute that was one day to be his final gesture when the first bullet struck him. . . . I cannot remember what he or any of us said, though I knew that I might never see him again. As on previous occasions, this seemed to me unimportant. He remains the central figure of this book, but that was actually the last time that I ever saw his face.

My next three letters from Gandhiji were from Yeravda Jail. They were very personal – full of affection and, indeed, such letters as a father might have written to a son. His gratitude for the little that I had been trying to do was embarrassing; and it still makes me feel rather a fraud to read what he said about my poor efforts. With him at Yeravda were various old friends of mine, including Mahadev Desai, whom we were so soon to lose, for he died in prison. 'You do not know,' wrote Bapu, 'how glad we all are when we hear from you.' As he was incapable of flattery, this had to be taken as a literal expression of his feelings. It is fortunate that affection is something we have no need to earn or deserve.

The work in England became progressively easier after 1931. As I have already pointed out, the difficulty with regard to press publicity had been at its greatest under the Labour Government, for obvious reasons. The more radical papers, which consider it part of their normal stock-in-trade to have a crack at imperialism from time to time, will only do so when it serves to show up the sins of the Tories. Writing once more under a Labour Government, I have had

reason to realise this fact again, with all its implications.[1] Indeed, there were even greater difficulties. One of my most depressing memories of the campaign in England after my return in 1930 was of a meeting in a working-class area. I had followed my usual practice of giving only facts which could be substantiated from Government reports or other British sources known to be hostile to Congress; and from these sources I had built up a picture of political repression – the numbers in jail for political reasons, the official figures of those killed, the lawless 'ordinances' which placed life, liberty and property at the mercy of a few individuals. The details, however, are unimportant. What got me down was the comment of a simple, sincere old man with a troubled face who seemed to me to speak for millions in this country. He rose from his seat in the silence that followed my speech and spoke with obvious emotion: 'I've listened to what the speaker said, and I just don't believe such things are done by any Government of which George Lansbury is a member.'

The audience applauded that – it was the straw at which they clutched, overwhelmed by an ocean of unpalatable facts. But it served. I did not even tell them – for it would only have increased their scepticism – that Lansbury had been continually and directly informed of all that I had told them and much more – that he had been begged in vain to resign just in order to avoid such a situation as this, in which his name stood guarantor for the good conduct of the Government. In later years Lansbury publicly admitted that he had defaulted as a pacifist during that time – a confession which took courage. But the failure of his colleagues, as professing socialists and democrats, though never acknowledged, was no less fatal; for they too carried with them, in varying degrees, the pathetic confidence of the British working-class.

From the time when the 'National Government' was formed everything changed. The age of the Blimp Cult began. It was strange that a cartoonist in a Tory paper should have set the fashion for the Left intelligentsia. From the point of view of the *Evening Standard* the whole creation was clearly a convenient Aunt Sally,

[1] To take but a single example, my friend George Padmore recently wrote a book entitled *Africa – Britain's Third Empire*. Its importation has been banned in Kenya, Uganda, Rhodesia and the Gold Coast. Had this occurred under a Conservative Government I have no doubt that the Labour press would have used it as an example of Tory villainy. But in the present circumstances we shall be lucky to get a faint squeak from the Labour Back Bench and its press equivalent.

which to a large extent diverted attention from the real reactionaries and focused it on a dead-and-dug-up figure of fiction. This simple device worked; and for years fatuous young men, feeling frightfully 'left', boldly plugged this deceased donkey, with his antediluvian 'Gad, sir!' under the impression that they were disposing of reaction with a sophisticated ha-ha.

Ridiculous as this was – and it certainly gave plenty of cover to all the really dangerous people who had the sense not to talk like stage comedians – it did mark a period when it was correct and fashionable to be awfully jolly progressive, so to speak; and India came in for a pittance of favourable publicity. Even so there were exceptions. Harold Laski, writing in the *Daily Herald* (April 2nd 1932) went out of his way to praise Sir John Anderson, who had been sent out to Bengal so that he might repeat the exploits with which his 'Black and Tans' had attempted to subdue Ireland. And even later Mr Attlee, writing only a year or two before the war, said that 'there is no particular gain in handing over the peasants and workers of India to be exploited by their own capitalists and landlords'[1]—an ingenious argument which somehow justified the Labour Party in its policy of collaborating with British capitalists and helping to hold down India in their interests. But events were moving faster than Clement Attlee; and in the great retreat from India it was not long before the Labour leader was trotting alongside of Churchill.

For my own part, though I never deserted the Indian cause, I drifted away from Gandhi's philosophy of life and conduct. From 1932 until the war my approach became increasingly political, moving fairly steadily to the left until I could see the Trotskyists at some distance to my right, looking very conservative. The effect of this absorption in politics was that my correspondence with Gandhiji became even less frequent, for I was excluding from my life all the things he held to be of greater importance than politics. One has always to remember that Gandhi was a 'politician' only in a secondary and a very limited sense. (He never stood as a candidate for any legislature, never exercised the authority of any government,

[1] In *The Labour Party in Perspective*, by Clement Attlee, 1938. In this book Attlee applied a very different standard to the situation in Britain, where the foundations of class collaboration in war were already being laid; 'It is no good telling the ordinary Briton,' he said, 'that it does not matter to him whether he is ruled by British or Foreign capitalists. He does not believe it. He is right.' Indians felt similarly, but were evidently wrong – in 1938.

and never wanted to do so.) A post-card from him in 1935, saying that he had written to an English friend I had recommended to him, asked 'Why don't you tell me something about yourself?' The answer, had I given it, was that I did not expect him to approve of my general line, and preferred not to discuss it.

Three years later, I made an exception to this rule, for personal reasons, telling him some things which I knew would not please him. In his reply (dated April 14th, 1938) he said: 'My heart goes out to you. What does it matter that on some things we don't see eye to eye?' At the end of that letter he wrote: 'The fact that you are a seeker of truth is enough to sustain the bond between us.' Like all his later letters to me this was addressed to 'Angada' – a name I had acquired in India[1]—and signed 'Love from us all, Bapu.' We had never been further apart in thought and in our objectives, yet he could write these unforgettable words of true comradeship and affection.

My last letter from Gandhi was received seven years later. During the war I had written very little to friends abroad, and not at all – so far as I remember – to Gandhiji. I had felt no interest in such correspondence when letters had to run the gauntlet of 'enemy action' and those which survived my supposed enemies were submitted to the scrutiny of my alleged friends – for the censorship was quite certain to prevent one from saying anything of any real interest or importance. But those years were for me a time when I reconsidered my ideas on many subjects. When the war began I was merely anti-imperialist and anti-militarist; at the end of it I had found my way back to a real and positive pacifism. I was ready once more, in 1945, to learn from the greatest man of our time what he could teach me about the sources of spiritual vision, of human understanding, of tolerance and charity.

In this new mood I therefore wrote to Gandhiji again, feeling that much of what I had now learned was the result of my association with him fifteen years previously – though it had taken years of trial and error (especially the latter) to show me how right he had really been. I even began to understand at last the emphasis that he placed upon social decentralisation. This conception, which had interested me in my early study of the *panchayat* and its functions, suddenly acquired new significance; for I realised that it is only

[1] He was a white ape employed by the Gods when opening hostilities against the powers of Darkness, at that time residing in Ceylon.

through the small community that we can hope to save mankind and what is worth saving of 'civilisation'. Decentralisation had, in fact, become a corollary of my pacifist faith – as it was in the mind of Gandhi himself.

He received my letter on New Year's Day, 1946, and replied the same evening. 'Your letter,' he said, 'just presents you as I have known you.' He never saw people merely as they were, but as what they could become. Once more there was the warm invitation to return to India; and this time I was determined to find a way, though there were many difficulties. An Indian friend, returning from London two years later, saw the old man in December 1947 and recorded in a letter that he had 'especially asked' for information about me. So I know that at the time of his death I was still remembered with affection.

He died, I think, a very lonely man. As Pascal said, '*On mourra seul.*' It came out in things that I was told later by those who were nearest to him in thought. Very few could follow him all the way. Not many could fully understand him – and, true to form, I am one of those who is still frankly perplexed by the apparent contradictions in some of his last utterances, especially those which related to Kashmir. Many people could have expressed themselves more clearly than he did at that critical point in the history of the new India; but nobody could have offered a clearer testimony in terms of life. The great thing that one came in the end to appreciate about Mohandas Gandhi was that what a man is and does matters so much more than what he says. Most of us can talk much better than we live; but Gandhiji, who said many fine and memorable things, overshadowed his own words. If they were sometimes hard to understand, his life was a beacon set upon a hill; its meaning could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER SIX

'Judge not', he said. His wisdom saw
That crime was judgment on the Law;
For crime is measure of desert –
Disease that festers in the social dirt.
Like quacks we drug the nerves, and see no flaw
When all our cure is but to kill the hurt.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES of my first visit to India were involved, subjective and inexplicable; but one thing may be mentioned here which directly links them with my return twenty years later. It concerns Horace Alexander, a man almost as well known in India today as Charles Andrews was in my boyhood, and that for similar reasons, which cannot be briefly explained. But among the many Europeans who have been associated with Gandhi and the cause of Indian freedom the name of Horace Alexander cannot be ignored either by future Indian historians or by biographers of the Mahatma.

I first met him in 1922, having gone straight from school, before I was seventeen, to a Quaker college at Selly Oak, known as Woodbrooke Settlement. It was a place where you could study a good range of subjects, and I attended lectures by Horace on various aspects of international politics. I liked his dry, sardonic humour and his paradoxes, and above all I enjoyed his indiscretions. I liked the place, too and the people. I went for a single term originally, just to broaden my mind (as the saying is) before forcing it into the groove of a university syllabus. I stayed two years instead, nominally working for an external degree at London. But the broadening just went on – I could not help it – and of course I failed 'Inter' and never looked back.

It was Horace Alexander who encouraged me to set aside text books and begin what should have been (so far as I remember) a study of mediæval and modern English History by reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*. After that he prescribed Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire* and a number of other excellent books of which those who compiled the syllabus were apparently ignorant, such as Rousseau's *Contrat Social*. And the odd thing is that it was not this meandering

course in history that bunkered me – unless it did so indirectly, by making life far too interesting. Where I came unstuck was in my pitiful ignorance of Latin, which I had always disliked and given up entirely from the age of fifteen. In vain I now kept rigidly to the text books, so far as Latin was concerned. To this day – when the lore of mediæval Latin writers has become a passion and a hobby, I read their works slowly and painfully. If Horace had only superintended my Latin studies he would probably have told me to give the set books a rest, and turned me loose on Matthew Paris or the *Malleus Maleficarum*, with the aid of Du Cange. It might even have worked.

And it was Horace who turned up in the spring of 1929, when everything had gone wrong, the way things do go wrong. I don't mean examinations – I had put all that behind me years ago, and gone into the family business at Glastonbury in Somerset, where I was a conspicuous failure – but I don't mean that, either. On Street Hill, part of the long ridge south-west of the Vale of Avalon, I walked one Sunday with Horace, who was a week-end visitor to those parts. He had recently returned from a visit to India, and was full of the *Indian Ferment* – the title he gave to his first book about the country. Any number of people had given me sensible advice, but that was what I most did not want. Horace listened to me, striding by my side and nodding his bird-like head with the mischievous eyes, and then he said, quite suddenly: 'Why don't you go to India?'

'To India,' I said – he might as well have said Hell or Timbuctoo at that moment – 'and where should I go to in India?'

'To Gandhi's *ashram*.'

'What do you mean – you can't just go to a place like that.'

'But that's just what you can do.'

'And what happens then?'

'Oh, you leave that to Gandhi. He'd find a use for you, all right, if you could fit into the life there. And I think you would.'

So it was Horace who really sent me to India in 1929, for that conversation was the beginning of the whole business. The conversation was resumed in August, in the Norwegian mountains, where I had an interesting holiday with Horace Alexander and other old Woodbrooke friends. Conversations with Horace are a little disjointed on such occasions, as he is an ardent ornithologist. But when his binoculars are not in action he can come to earth, all

right. His ideas are often startling, but he is always prepared to work them out in practical detail.

It was, therefore, not surprising to me when I heard, in 1947, of a new project sponsored by Horace and others which had – superficially – an air of unreality about it. And yet, because he was involved in the matter, I knew that it was no mere whimsy – it was likely to be worked out with all the energy and patience which my friend could throw into any scheme to make realities of his own dreams. Had he not dreamed of Indian freedom when it had appeared madness to most Englishmen and something far beyond the horizon of hope even to those who most strongly believed in its essential rightness? For many years Horace had been living in India, trying – at Gandhi's own request – to fill the great gap left by the death of Charlie Andrews, on whose advice the Mahatma had so often relied in his dealings with the British. Like Andrews, Horace was universally trusted and esteemed, and, above all, he was trusted by Gandhi himself in many difficult negotiations.

This time the talk was of a conference of pacifists from all over the world, who were to meet in India. Gandhiji himself had agreed to preside, and the purpose was that the pacifists of the West and of the world in general should learn something of the mind and methods of the man who had made 'non-violence' a positive force and proved its efficacy in social and political struggles. It was a project which appealed to me from the day when I first heard of it, walking around the grounds of a guest house at Haywards Heath. My informant – one of the earliest initiators of the plan, for it had evidently been privately discussed for some time – expressed a strong opinion that I should be among those to attend this conference in India. It seemed quite incredible.

For months after that I could only hope that it would indeed be my privilege to meet the great *Guru* of India once more. It was like my neglected Latin – I felt I had missed the chance of learning when I had it, and that I was working my way slowly and painfully through the problems of social ethics with utterly inadequate equipment, and above all with inadequate spiritual *power*. But here, indeed, was an opportunity to make good some of my deficiencies – if that opportunity came. And step by step I watched it materialise. While the plans for the Conference in India became each month more concrete, my own place in it became assured. One could only attend the Conference by invitation of an *ad hoc* committee set up in

India. But the Council of the War Resisters' International, meeting in August, 1947, put forward two names to the Indian Committee, requesting their consideration; and my name was one of them. Not long after I was unofficially informed that I was 'on the list'. Humility is not a strong point with me, but when I heard that news I did wonder, in spite of my great longing to go, whether there were not many others who were better fitted to do so. To that doubt I replied that there was certainly none with a greater need, if need rather than desert were to be the criterion.

Then, on a grey evening in January, 1948, there came news which stunned humanity. I was on a 'bus on January 30th when I saw those horrifying placards. Gandhi was dead. My first words when I had grasped the fact and read the blurred print of a newspaper were the same, I found, as those of many others: 'Thank God it was a Hindu.' Had the assassin been a Moslem, the results would have been too frightful to contemplate. But there is no need to detail one's personal thoughts at such a time. What struck me in the days that followed was the wealth of testimony regarding men and women who had never known this man – or so one would have thought – except through the ridicule of caricature and the unscrupulous misrepresentation by newspapers of everything he said and did. These people – factory workers, charwomen, housewives and people of all conditions, but especially the poor in this England of ours – in instance after instance of which I afterwards heard, had spoken of Gandhi's death as something they had felt *personally*. They had been deeply moved.

I did not know this at first. I only read the papers from time to time and fell into silence, one half of me glad that the leaders of the world had found sufficient magnanimity to pay such tributes to a man who was so much greater than the greatest of them – the other half of me bitterly resentful that such a man must die a martyr's death before he could obtain this recognition. Words came into my mind – the words of Vachel Lindsay in his lament over John Altgeld, *The Eagle that is Forgotten:*

> *They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you, day after day*
> *Now you were ended. They praised you . . . and laid you away*

Less than twenty four hours after I heard the news of Gandhi's death I was at Haywards Heath, where a special commission of the War Resisters' International was meeting for the week-end. We

met in the same guest house at which, during the previous year, I had first heard of the World Pacifist Conference and first glimpsed the hope of meeting Gandhiji again.

Now everything was changed. I did not know whether there would be any conference, or whether I wished to go if it was still to take place. I was supposed to open the subject for discussion, but arrived utterly unprepared. However, it was good to be with a group of people who felt much as I felt, whether they had known Gandhi or not. With a determination such as Gandhiji himself would, I know, have approved, we got on with the work assigned to us and considered his death in the same practical way – how his work could best be continued, and how, in particular, his martyrdom itself could be made an instrument for the fulfilment of his own ideals. One thing stood out immediately in our view – the problem of the wretched man who had murdered him. Unanimously we decided, some two dozen English men and women whose names were not widely known, whose influence would certainly not be great, that we would do what we could to prevent the execution of the assassin. I shall say more of this later, but I wish to record it as the first practical decision in the minds of a group of people who loved and admired Gandhi that they desired to see his known wishes applied in this matter and to stay the hand of vengeance which has too long usurped the name of Justice.

News came eventually, after some months, that the Conference was to take place in spite of an event which must inevitably change its character, though not its essential purpose. We were still to meet in India, and (if we willed it) the spirit of Gandhi would indeed preside at our discussions. Here, again, I saw the hand of Horace Alexander – it was the course I would have expected him to urge. I, too, had realised by then that this was the right decision – any other would have been an admission of defeat. If Gandhi's life and teaching meant anything at all, it meant that we must not be dependent on the physical presence of any leader. The corporate strengths of all those who ever came under his influence must now be organised to replace this one man; and the Conference was, in that sense, more urgent than ever.

The official invitation came to me, but there was delay and a year's postponement. It was not until October 22nd, 1949, that I found myself actually on board the *Jal Azad* of the Indian-owned Scindia Line, with thirteen other delegates (four of them women)

from twelve different countries – a small contingent of the ninety or more delegates assembling in India.

They were an interesting collection of people, but I will name only a few. Heinz Kraschutzki I had known before, on the Council of the War Resisters' International. A German Naval Officer of the first world war, he had been in command of a mine-sweeper at the time of the German naval mutiny in 1918 and had the distinction of being elected by the men previously under his command to represent them in the revolutionary 'Workers and Soldiers Council' at Bremerhaven. Under the Weimar Republic he had opposed German re-armament and exposed the secret measures whereby it was even then being carried out. Indicted for High Treason on this account, he had fled to Spain and lived there peaceably until the Civil War, when he had been imprisoned by Franco. It was not until after the second world war that he had been released, being one of the many who owed their freedom to the untiring efforts of the War Resisters' International – or rather, to its Chairman and Secretary. (The story of escapes and prison releases organised by these two, the late Runham Brown and my friend Grace Beaton, is appropriate matter for a thriller yet to be written.)

Returning to Berlin, Heinz soon found himself too pro-Russian to please the Americans, and too pro-American to satisfy the Russians. He was refused a visa to visit the United States for a temporary lecturing post, and he was sacked from a post in the Russian Zone for teaching history without the proper Marxist bias. His only comment, in a letter to me, was 'Now I *know* that I am right!' One of his sons is among those lost prisoners who have never come back from Russia, but he is completely without bitterness. With the same stoical endurance he accepted the loss of an eye, after his return from Germany, when a splinter flew from some wood he was chopping. I never heard that man even once complain of his hard fate.

Diderick Lund, from Norway, had been a passive resister under the occupation. Like most members of his family, he had been in a German concentration camp, from which he had escaped. I wish I could give an account of other members of the party, But I will restrict myself to the undisputed 'leader' of the group, who took the chair at our private discussions – Richard Gregg, a quiet, gentle American (it sounded almost like a contradiction in terms) whom I had met very briefly on my previous visit to India. Only three of us

had been in the country before, and there was no question that, of the three, it was Richard who best knew and understood India in general and Gandhi in particular. He too had lived at the Sabarmati *ashram* and had done much to explain Gandhi's ideas to the West in his books, especially *The Economics of Khaddar* and *The Power of Non-Violence*. For years Richard had been farming in Vermont, successfully applying the principles of organic husbandry associated in England with the name of Sir Albert Howard. Dreamer, philosopher, farmer, I do not know a man living who is nearer to being also a saint, and a very amusing, leg-pulling, lovable old saint at that.

Of that voyage on the *Jal Azad* – a most memorable event for most of us – the discussions every evening on the poop deck were the more interesting feature; and my own notes on this subject, made while we were still in the Red Sea, describe the development of these discussions as I recorded it at the time:

> It was obvious that the delegates (three from England, one from America, and the rest from various countries in Europe) would need to meet and discuss many things.
>
> With nearly three weeks at sea before us we hoped for some useful discussions which would help us to know each other better, and to make a better contribution when we meet the rest of the delegates at Santiniketan. Meeting every morning we have tried to fulfil this double purpose, while those who have previously been to India have done their best to 'put the others wise' regarding any matters in which Indian customs differ from those of Europeans.
>
> And yet, important as these small group discussions have been, I think that for most of us another, and quite unexpected, development has come to overshadow them. It is something that began quite spontaneously, and without any planning on our part, after we had all been shaken together in the Atlantic.
>
> With better weather and passengers enjoying the sun (also the luxury of not feeling sick) it happened that two people who were not members of our delegation asked a delegate to tell something of his own story. He soon found that he was talking to five or six people, and was asked to continue the next day.
>
> Somehow this became a regular event on the poop deck, every evening at 4.30 p.m., when different delegates spoke of their experiences. Out of 150 passengers (all classes) some forty or fifty began coming regularly.

'The Talks', as they came to be called, were given in English; but it soon came to light that a young Punjabi was giving a translation of what was said to about a dozen others, mainly Sikhs, who did not understand English.

No announcement has ever been made about these meetings – people just met, and during the day one would be asked who was to talk this evening, and what about. 'The Talks' have been attended by Indians and Europeans from all the three 'classes', the European element including, beside our own delegation, a Scottish Sergeant-Major (at present on loan to the Indian Army) and others from Europe and America.

The delegates have carefully avoided either advertising these meetings or taking any responsibility for organising them. The only organisation required is that someone should be asked to speak, and this is left to the decision of people outside our group.

Our speakers did not talk theoretical pacifism, but discussed their work and their personal experiences. They invited questions, and invariably had so many that the meetings were only broken up by the supper bell.

Then gradually those attending 'The Talks' began to decide for themselves what subject or speaker they wanted for the next evening. The two people who had been most active in this matter were delighted at this development, and gladly handed over the responsibility they had assumed.

The next development was that the Sikhs, who were about to celebrate the birthday of Nanak, the Guru who founded the religion, expressed a wish that we should all join them.

The pacifist delegates, at their next morning meeting, decided that some further information about Sikhism was desirable, and so for the first time we ventured to make a suggestion ourselves, regarding 'The Talks'. It was accepted, and we devoted an evening to the subject, our Punjabi friend (a Hindu) helping the Sikhs to explain the nature of their religion, and to answer questions.

Guru Nanak's birthday celebrations were held this morning (November 5th, an easy date to remember) and were attended by nearly a hundred passengers, mostly Hindus and Europeans – about two-thirds of the total number on board.

Meanwhile, 'The Talks' have become increasingly popular. There was a record attendance this evening; and although we were interrupted by a lifeboat drill, everyone hurried back to make use of the remaining half-hour.

Slowly, too, as the group – roughly the same nucleus every evening – becomes more coherent, the character of 'The Talks'

themselves is changing. Those who were at first silent listeners are now active participants, and this evening we dispensed with any prearranged speaker or speakers.

The Europeans on this occasion asked questions which all of the Indians were free to answer. We had intended to reverse the procedure tomorrow; but the feeling was that we should continue from where we left off.

There is no chairman at these meetings. We are just so many people talking, as we might in our own homes. As we talk, the sun goes down abruptly over the rim of the Red Sea, and within forty-five minutes the only light on the faces of the speakers is that of the moon, now at its full. And among the fourteen delegates there is a great sense of exhilaration – a sense that the work of our Conference has begun here and now, among a strange variety of people whom chance has thrown together. Friendships on board a ship are notorious for their superficiality; but we are all convinced that here we have found something deeper.

Among those lasting friendships one is particularly worth noting. Few of our party thought, when we heard that the new Czech Ambassador to India was on the ship, that we should later remember Dr Kratochvil and his charming wife among the great 'discoveries' of the voyage. Modest, unassuming, gentle, understanding and intellectually brilliant, the Czech Ambassador soon showed himself also a very keen observer of people. Those of us who met him later in India were astonished at the rapidity with which he had applied the same powers of observation to the complicated problems of that country. But most of all I think he impressed us by his humanity. His own sufferings in a German concentration camp seemed to have deepened his sympathy with his fellow men. I thought him one of the most really sensitive people I had ever met.

The last night on the *Jal Azad* we sang songs on deck – songs of every country. I recalled by contrast my last night on the voyage out in 1929, when the gentlemen of the First Class demonstrated the superiority of the British Rulers (and of their own class in particular) by prolonged and drunken bawling. On the *Jal Azad* it was the Indians who set the pace; and as we approached the shores of free India the young students sang *Jana-Gana-Mana*, Tagore's beautiful poem, which has now become the national anthem. They gave it all they had, and I have never heard it better sung than it was at the end of our impromptu concert.

Jaya hay, Jaya hay! Victory be thine, they sang. They seemed – yes – transfigured. And in my own heart there was great hope.

At last, on the morning of November 11th, we docked at Bombay. Prominent among those whom we could see on the quay was the long, lean figure of Horace Alexander. He was soon on board, with a number of others who had come to welcome us, including representatives of the press and the radio; and it was clear that we were to be treated as honoured guests. It was soon known that the Governor of Bombay Presidency had invited us to a reception at Government House on the following day, and that the Provincial Prime Minister wished to meet us afterwards. In view of a matter that had been weighing on the minds of us all, so official a welcome was particularly embarrassing; for our first duty on arrival was to express some opinions unlikely to add to our popularity in government circles. Within two hours of clearing the customs we were in earnest discussion regarding this matter with Horace and members of the local Reception Committee.

I have already referred to the deep feeling which had clearly been shared by those who happened to meet at Haywards Heath the day after Gandhi's death – a feeling with regard to the imperative necessity for clemency in the treatment of the assassin. It was not simply that all real pacifists must obviously be opposed to capital punishment. All in that group at Hayward's Heath were opposed to the death penalty in any circumstances, and so were my companions on the *Jal Azad*. But from the very beginning the friends and admirers of Gandhi in the West felt that an additional and peculiarly urgent reason applied to this case. It was not even that the execution of the assassin would be directly contrary to Gandhi's known views on violence and his clearly expressed wishes on previous occasions when he had been treated or threatened with violence. In a way which any moderately sensitive and imaginative person could understand the sacramental character of Gandhi's death would be reduced to the level of any common felony and its future value very largely destroyed if blood was taken for blood. What, after all, is the Ritual Murder which we call the death penalty if it is not a sort of blood offering by which one death is supposed to be 'expiated' by another?

It was essential, in our view, that India and humanity should not be deceived into thinking that the blood of Gandhi could be so easily 'expiated'. In an inspired moment Krishna Menon, the Indian

High Commissioner in London, when speaking shortly after Gandhi's murder, had said: 'We are all guilty.' Everyone who had thought or condoned violence, even by apathy and indifference, had contributed to the spirit which had found its expression ultimately in that assassin's bullet. So long as we knew that and accepted it we had something for which to make atonement. In India, where Gandhi was already all but deified by those

Who first misunderstood and murdered him
And then misunderstood and worshipped him,

the consciousness of some share in the guilt might yet make the worship less sterile. But with a scapegoat sacrificed this responsibility could be forgotten. And all that I subsequently saw in India confirmed my view that, for most people, this was exactly what actually took place.

From the time of that decision at Haywards Heath, during nearly two years, many of us[1] had used every means in our power to persuade the Indian authorities. In London two of us had tackled Devadas Gandhi, the Mahatma's youngest son. I had hopes of Devadas, whom I remembered as a gentle youth, without affectation, devoted to his father, whom he admired without seeking any reflected glory. When I had met him on this occasion I had found him much changed by twenty years, which had included many years of prosperity, as Business Manager of the *Hindustan Times.* With him was his wife, whom I had then met for the first time, the daughter of the first Indian Governor General, Rajaghopalachariar, the key-man if there was to be a reprieve. I shall not easily forget the shock with which I realised, at that meeting, how a man who had been at one time so close to Gandhi could regard the question of hanging or not hanging purely as a matter of political expediency. Neither principles nor sentiment had claimed any place in Devadas's dispassionate weighing-up of political pros and cons. And then, dismissing with relief a subject he clearly preferred not to discuss, my old friend had turned with real enthusiasm to ask my opinion about a project for erecting 'Gandhi pillars' in honour of his father, all over the country. . . .

It was while we were still at sea that the pacifists on the *Jal Azad* had learned of the Governor General's decision with regard to Godse (the assassin) and another man, who had been condemned to

[1] Including Laurence Housman, H. N. Brailsford and Tolstoy's youngest daughter.

death as his accomplice. Both were to be hanged on November 15th – four days after our arrival. The chance of saving these men, especially at such a late hour, was clearly very small; for we did not over-estimate the very small importance in India of our opinion though it was firm and unanimous. But we felt that something must be done at once to make our views known in Delhi, where – if there should happen to be any hesitation still in the mind of the Governor General or the Cabinet – it was possible . . . well, one never knew. We could neglect no conceivable chance in a matter of such importance.

Our discussion with friends in Bombay, on the day of our arrival, revealed an opposition that we had little anticipated. In the land of Gandhi, we had expected to find his known opinions understood and respected by at least an appreciable minority – and that minority we expected to find both organised and well represented among those who welcomed with so much enthusiasm the delegates to the World Pacifist Conference. Instead we found every conceivable reason put forward against our doing or saying anything at all. First of all there was our own position as newcomers in the country and to some extent guests of the Government, which had granted us special concessions for travelling at cut rates, and was anxious to show us courtesy in many other ways. Indeed, we had received invaluable help from the Government of India even in the matter of the voyage there, for all the members of our party owed their berths on the *Jal Azad* to the personal intervention of the High Commissioner, who had shown us the utmost kindness and goodwill. To this objection, however, we replied that we had already considered this matter, and decided that it ought not to deter us. Although it would not have been our preference, obviously, to begin our stay in India with a criticism, however privately made, it seemed wrong that we should let ourselves be silenced by the kindness we were receiving or that we should fail to speak out on a matter of moral urgency merely because we were newcomers.

Next we were told the point of view of the Governor General and of Vallabhbhai Patel, who was in charge of Home Affairs, and (as Deputy Prime Minister) the real ruler of the country during Nehru's absence in the West. They were all for hanging, we were told, and could hang with a good conscience – though I still cannot imagine 'Rajaji' doing the job himself. To put our point of view (we were told) was surely an attempt to violate the consciences of

these men. . . . By some distorted logic of 'non-violence' the effort to dissuade a person from violence had become a violent activity – the real violence contemplated no longer mattered. Then there were Godse's supporters and the 'R. S. S.' (Rastriya Sevak Sangha) the revolutionary Hindu-fascist organisation which has been breeding violent communal hatred against Moslems. Ironically enough, members of this organisation – which stands for everything that Gandhi died to oppose – had very recently been made eligible for membership in the Congress Party. But we were told that our appeal for clemency would be confused with that of Godse's friends and other Hindu fanatics. (It reminded me of the days when one was told that it was wrong to expose the evils of British imperialism because it would 'play into the hands of Hitler' – and indeed there is always some such plausible excuse for being silent about any evil, no matter how glaring.)

Many who claimed to be pacifists seemed to see nothing wrong in the cold-blooded, calculated murders that are committed in the name of law – so much less excusable than violence in the heat of passion, or in self-defence. We were referred to a tepid article in *Harijan*, written by one of Gandhi's numerous 'disciples', of which the gist was that a Government must administer the law (the old British law – which Gandhi had so often defied). There seemed to be no recognition of the fact that the Government can make and unmake laws, that (apart from this) in matters of punishment the power of pardon or commutation of sentence lies with the head of the state. And, above all, there seemed to be no realisation of the fact that the death penalty is not the basis of 'law and order'; that it has, in fact, been abolished in many countries; and that the opposition to it is by no means confined to pacifists. The conservatism of the opinion we encountered in Bombay, its utter unawareness of more progressive currents of thought in other countries, was a shock from which I took some time to recover. I have dealt with it at some length because it conveys as clearly as words can my own first impressions of what passes for progressive opinion in that city of merchant princes and paupers. It was fortunate that in my subsequent travels I was able to see a very different side of Indian life, but at the outset I was deeply depressed.

One person in particular, however, did not fail on that first day to encourage us in going forward with what we had determined to do – that was Madame Sophia Wadia, the Secretary of the P.E.N.

Club in India and the hostess at whose house we met for our final decision on the evening of the 11th. Our decision was that Richard Gregg should fly to Delhi the following morning and immediately seek an interview with the Governor General, to whom he was well known personally. Richard was to represent our united view in this matter and to make a final bid for the application of a little 'Gandhism' in Gandhi's own country.[1] Hopeless as the task was, we all knew that Richard, alone of us all, could undertake it with even a shadow of hope.

Bombay has been described often enough – I avoided attempting any description of the place on my first visit and I think there would be little purpose in attempting to say much of my impressions on this occasion. I found myself housed in considerable luxury high up above the town, on Cumbala Hill, in the flat of Kamalnayan Bajaj, the son of old Jamnalalji, who had been a most generous supporter of Gandhi and often my own kindly host at Wardha. Of the many functions which we attended, in rapid succession, I will only mention our interview with the Prime Minister of Bombay Presidency, at his own request, because it was such a strange one. The P.M. had evidently heard of our concern regarding the impending executions and (although the matter had absolutely nothing to do with his own Provincial Government) he led the conversation directly to this subject. I call it a conversation, but it was almost a monologue, for Dr Kher hardly ever paused. If he asked a question, as very occasionally he did, it was clearly a mere figure of rhetoric, because he immediately interrupted anyone attempting to answer it. His discourse was a cheerful eulogy of the virtues of hanging in general, and of hanging Gandhi's murderer in particular.[2] In a Lower School debate it might have passed as tolerable, but as an oration to a reasonably intelligent audience it was quite preposterous. All that we kept asking ourselves was why on earth this man had taken it

[1] On one single point I would like to qualify this criticism. There was absolutely no 'gloating' in the Indian press with regard to Godse's condemnation and death. In this respect I thought India compared favourably with England, where a kind of vulture journalism thrives on such cases. Miss Rebecca West, among others, has excelled herself in attacking men whose punishment, one would have thought, was sufficient without the addition of abuse to which they were powerless to reply.

[2] I was interested to learn later, at Allahabad, that Dr Kher had visited the Agricultural Institute and had turned away, much revolted, when a young bull was being castrated. It really is a pity that those who support and maintain the institution of capital punishment are not compelled to be witnesses at hangings. The practice would soon, I think, be abolished.

upon himself to open up the subject at all; and I still do not know the answer to that, though I could have answered all his rhetorical questions standing on my head. Once only, when he paused for breath, I cut in with 'May I ask you a question?'

'Why – yes,' he said guardedly.

'Do you agree with the principles of Gandhiji or those of Godse?'

He knew quite well what I meant – Godse was to die on Godse's own principle, which the Prime Minister himself had explained as one of expediency. He had even gone out of his way to explain that Godse sincerely believed the end to have justified the means, which corresponded exactly with the Prime Minister's own case for the death penalty. So the issue was simply whether Godse was to be judged by his own law or by Gandhi's. I had no reply, of course. The Prime Minister continued to regard us with the same expressionless grin, and to talk round and round the point until it was time for us to leave.

Richard, of course, failed in his mission to Delhi. We did not hear the full story until later, but the Governor General paid him the courtesy of calling personally at the Quaker Centre, where Richard was staying, on the morning of Sunday 13th. He soon made it clear that he believed in capital punishment, and that so far as he was concerned the matter began and ended there. It is curious to reflect that 'Rajaji' was once known as 'the Gandhi of the South'.

Meanwhile I had made my own plans. Nehru was arriving in Bombay from his visit to America and England, and there was to be a big reception on the 14th, to which we were invited. I felt I could not stand much more of Bombay, and certainly not all this *tamasha* at the very moment when official India was spitting on the memory of Gandhi. It was Nehru's birthday, too, and somebody had conceived the vulgar notion of presenting him with a diamond studded pillar, worth some incredible sum, to which the wealthy citizens of Bombay – who cheerfully watch their neighbours starve – had very gladly subscribed. I was glad to hear later that Nehru had treated this ridiculous gift with evident impatience, utterly unimpressed, as well he might be. But I was far away by then. Early on Monday morning, November 14th, I took the train to Ahmedabad, following the route of my first visit to India and making my way to the one place where, at that moment, I could hope to feel at home – the old *ashram* at Sabarmati.

CHAPTER SEVEN

We must acquire a new sense of purpose. . . . It is safe to say that one of its signs will be a revolt from the mechanistic view of the world and from the related conception of man and his fellow creatures being primarily cogs in an economic machine.

LORD NORTHBOURNE

IT WAS late at night when I arrived at Ahmedabad. I was met by the *ashram* car – the first innovation to be noted – and by some kindly strangers. Though they did not know me, they knew a good deal about me, and they knew that I had 'come back'. They were evidently determined to treat me as a very special guest. I appreciated their motives, but reminded them that I had been used to living at Sabarmati not as a guest, but as one of the community. I told them of Bapu's words: 'The ashram is your home', and said I wanted to take this literally. They smiled and said that was all they wished to do – to make me feel at home.

I was taken to a new guest house – new, that is to say, since my time – equipped with unheard-of luxuries, such as chairs and a table, knives and forks and china. Here I was offered a bath – Indian style, of course – with hot water from a boiler (another innovation). Three men and two women sat and talked to me as I had supper, waited upon by the women. The food, though simple, was less so than in the old days, and I had a great surprise when I was asked whether I would like tea or coffee.

How well I remembered the English lady who had once visited Sabarmati when I was there. She had thought her needs very simple. She did not even know that she was sitting on the only chair in the *ashram*. She had said she wanted 'nothing – just a cup of tea'; and I had laughed a little maliciously (for she was of the patronising kind) and said that tea was just what she would not get.

'When I was travelling to Wardha with Bapu,' I told the five friends, 'I remember how we stopped at a station, and there sat old Abbas Tyabji (one of Bapu's closest Moslem followers, as you will remember) – well there he sat looking wistfully at the tea being sold on the platform. I was watching Bapu watching Abbas, and it

was a comical sight. Bapuji's eyes were twinkling and suddenly he laughed. "Go on Abbas," he said, "go and get your poison." We all laughed and Gandhiji suddenly wheeled round towards me. "You'd better take Reginald with you," the old man said, "he's dying for a cup too." Well, I won't say no to the poison, but I never expected to be offered it at Sabarmati.'

We talked until about midnight. Then two of the men took me outside. Without a spoken word they led me past the little house where Gandhi had lived, at which place we paused long in silence. Then on to the prayer ground, where we took off our shoes and walked straight to the place where Bapu used to sit. I do not know how long I remained there, for there was a timeless moment when past and present merged. There are things which we profane merely by trying to describe them with our limited vocabulary, drawn from the material world, and the equally useless abstractions, so vague and theoretical when the spiritual world becomes vivid and substantial. The two friends joined in my silence and spoke no word as we returned to the guest house.

Prayers the next morning were at five o'clock – an hour later than they used to be, but still before dawn. I threw a blanket round me and joined the silent group of figures on their way to the prayer ground – all of us roused by the same ferocious bell that used to jerk me from sleep, twenty years before. It was the morning of the execution, and they gave me Bapu's place on the prayer ground. The two who had been with me the previous night sat long with me in silence, after the others had dispersed. In a strange, indescribable way I felt that I was there for some purpose, a pitifully inadequate representative of Gandhi, chosen by fate for reasons as obscure as those which had once caused Bapu himself to choose me to be his emissary. I knew that something was being done to him which the assassin's bullet could not do. Nathuram Godse had destroyed that frail body; but those who were hanging Godse were defiling the memory of his victim. This man had given Gandhi the crown of martyrdom – if ever a man had failed, it was the assassin, who had but gilded an immortal name when he tried to destroy an idea with his leaden argument. But where Godse had failed, those who reverenced the name of Gandhi had succeeded. The murderer also was now to be honoured with martyrdom; it was the code of Barabbas which had triumphed.

Over the dusty plains of Gujerat the sun rose. I remembered how

the murderer of the first Christian apostles had lived to repent and become himself the greatest of those apostles. Had the friends of Jesus been as powerful, as stupid and as unimaginative as the friends of Gandhi, Paul would never have taken the road to Damascus and 1 Corinthians xiii. would never have been written – the man who might have written those words would have been stoned to death by Peter and the others. It is no wonder that Justice is represented as blind. Retributive justice is the most stupid and blasphemous of all human inventions.

* * *

The two friends who had been with me the previous night showed me all that was to be seen at the *ashram* during the four days I spent there. One of those friends was the Head of the 'Basic School' and the other was the art master. As their names are both tongue-twisters for an Englishman, I will refer to them only by their occupations. I had heard much of 'Basic Education', the system devised by Gandhi for the needs of the Indian village, and I took a great interest in all they could show me. But as I was later to see many similar schools I will not discuss the system at present. The really distinctive feature of Sabarmati today is that it is a self-supporting *Harijan* colony – one of the many that were started, under Gandhi's influence, to give a new opportunity to the out-castes by teaching them useful trades and establishing them firmly in Indian society.

There had been a considerable extension of the original *ashram* buildings, and the colony now numbered over 500. Activities included the cultivation of the land and a model *Goshala* (dairy farm) the energetic director of which was trying to improve the breeding of cattle in the neighbourhood and to foster co-operation among the local owners of cattle. There were numerous industries, including sandal-making (I bought an excellent pair), paper-making, soap-boiling, spinning, weaving and the manufacture of *charkhas* (spinning wheels) – of which I was told that they sold thousands every year, almost all within the neighbouring district. I was interested to see that, in the manufacture of *charkhas*, as in many other things connected with the cotton industry, the design had been improved. The new *charkha* was derived from the portable wheel which Gandhi used to take with him. (He would spin not only on railway journeys, but often at public meetings – a most

enviable solace when speeches were long and uninspired.) People thought that portable spinning wheel something of a fetish; but it was a symbol, and at least as useful as a pair of knitting needles (the use of which is restricted to women, by an absurd *taboo*, thereby costing men a fortune in tobacco). But it was that ridiculous portable wheel which was eventually adapted for general use, and the modern type – costing about thirteen shillings (Rs. 9) at Sabarmati – folds into a compact box with a handle like a small attaché case.

The *Harijans* at Sabarmati looked well fed and well clothed. They were certainly well housed, and appeared altogether a thriving community. A judicious use of electrical power had been applied to some of the industries, which interested me. Electrical power, like wind and water, can be applied to decentralised industry, and in my own conception of any effective revival of craftsmanship it should have its place. In the various tasks, in each industry, all took their turn in order to avoid the more monotonous work falling always to the same people. The proof of the success of this enterprise was to be seen in the conditions of life and work. The workers here ate their own freshly grown produce, breathed pure air, took a pride in their work, found in it variety, and (by producing all the essentials of life) were largely independent of booms and slumps in the world market. They worked neither for a capitalist boss nor for a soul-less state corporation, but for themselves, each other and the pleasure of making a useful article, well designed.

The only objection to the introduction of mechanical power into such a community is that it requires capital, a primary object of such communities being to enable workers to find an independent life without such capital, which is not normally available. In this case, however, they had been able to accumulate the necessary capital, and I was glad to find that advocates of 'decentralisation' were not, in this instance, as bigoted about machinery as they are commonly believed to be. As to the size of the unit, I should judge that 500 is a good number for an effective community – large enough to reduce overhead costs substantially, but small enough to preserve the community sense which a decentralised economy ought to foster.

I stayed for five nights at Sabarmati. From the first morning three silent girls acted as my hostesses. They were *Harijan* lasses from the Girls' Hostel, where seventy-five girls from outlying villages came and lived for a period of five years, attending the Basic School, which was run primarily for the children of the colony.

'Why no boys' hostel?' I asked. The answer was that education among the male section of the *Harijans* was now in advance of the education of girls. They were trying to level up, as educated young men wanted educated wives! These girls were selected carefully, and it was hoped that they would return to their villages. As I shall explain later, 'Basic', unlike most forms of education, trains country people to make the best of their environment, and to help their fellow-villagers to do the same. It does *not* take the most intelligent people from the country and make them unfit to work anywhere except in a town office, or in one of the urban professions.

My three Guardian Angels, as I called them, had elected to look after me during my stay. They looked about sixteen years old, but were probably younger. When I protested that their presence was not necessary I was gently told that it would disappoint them if I refused their services. Besides, it was part of their essential training to know how to look after a guest! So they remained – three silent shadows which glided into the guest house before dawn and hovered on the verandah, watching me with large, soft eyes whenever there was nothing definite to do. It was by these girls that the boiler would be lit for my bath every morning, and breakfast brought to me after prayers. They swept the floors, made my bed, brought drinking water, and burnt incense continually in my room.

One thing to which I had to re-accustom myself in India was that silent, bare-foot entry of people through doorways that always stood open – covered at most by a curtain. You think you are alone, and suddenly you know that you are not. With servants this continued to irritate me – probably because I dislike the idea of servants, anyway, but also because my earlier training in India did not include a long enough course of being waited on by menials. However, with these kind hostesses, once my first feeling of embarrassment was overcome, I felt quite differently about this matter of privacy. All they did was carried out with the efficiency of an adult and the gravity of a child at play. They spoke no English and I knew no Gujerati, but we smiled and said '*Namusteh*' to each other from time to time. By my standards they were three very sweet children, and by their standards I expect I was a very funny man – 'funny peculiar', that is to say.

I had long and interesting talks with the headmaster, the art master and an ex-diamond merchant, a much travelled man with a good knowledge of the world and a witty tongue. He had given up

the world, the flesh and the diamonds to come and live at this place, where he was (I gathered) in the process of 'finding himself'. (It is one of the subsidiary functions of a good *ashram* that it serves the needs of such people. Many a neurotic in the West who has spent a fortune on psychologists, nursing homes and expensive holidays prescribed by equally expensive physicians would, in my view, be healed by six months of work and meditation in an *ashram.*) The art master – a man with singularly sensitive and beautiful features – showed me the work of the children and some of his own, all of which was very striking, especially the modelling in clay. I expressed my delight at the way in which the arts had at last found a place in the Gandhian way of life, so puritanically austere in the past.

When, in 1930, I had visited Santiniketan and talked with Rabindranath Tagore he had spoken much of 'Fulness of Life' and deprecated what he called 'artificial simplicity' – by which I think he included the more rigorous austerities sometimes practised in the Gandhi *ashrams*. There is still on record in my journals a wild hope, as it seemed then, that the 'two eyes' of India would see together, and the traditions of Sabarmati and Santiniketan be united into something that would preserve the dedicated services of the one without sacrificing the rich cultural heritage that the other was trying to preserve and increase.

'And here you have achieved just that synthesis,' I said.

'Yes,' replied the art master, 'that at least is what we are trying to do.'

I reminded him of how Gurudev (Tagore) had once visited Bapu and how they had sparred, the way they liked to do, those two – and they loved each other the more for it.

'Why don't you dance?' asked Gurudev.

'When we have Swaraj I will dance,' Bapu replied.

'Ah,' sighed the poet, 'you keep in better health than I do, although you don't dance.'

'That's because you don't behave yourself,' answered the Sage of Sabarmati; 'If you behaved yourself you would get an arrest cure. I always do.' (A prison sentence was the nearest thing to a holiday that Gandhi ever experienced.)

The art master assured me that Bapu's promise had been kept. They had Swaraj and they most certainly danced. Would I like to see the girls of the hostel dance? Certainly, I said, if they would care to. The provision was unnecessary – I soon learnt that they would

be delighted to dance (not merely for my benefit I suspect); and the last evening of my stay I was given a display by these village girls.

They danced by the light of hurricane lamps, on the soft sand. The first dances were very formal, and rather slow; but gradually the tempo increased and the last dances were as wild as an Irish *ceilidhe*. They included some aboriginal dances, and a comical dance about a girl – impersonated by one of the dancers – who is being instructed on her future behaviour in the house of her husband's family, when she marries. (To understand all the subtleties of that dance one would have to know a good deal about the Hindu Joint Family System.) The music to which they sang was that of their own throats, one dancer generally leading the song and the others following, according to a method very common in Indian singing. Once, when the school staff became convulsed with laughter, I asked what the words were. It turned out that the girl leading the song was improvising and criticising each member of the staff in turn. They were admiring her resourcefulness and ingenuity.

I left Sabarmati unwillingly, being bound by a promise made in Bombay to visit Saurashtra, for a tour beginning on November 18th. At the *ashram* I had at least seen something of the work which Gandhi had begun, continued with devotion, enthusiasm and intelligence by his real followers. I emphasise intelligence, because there is still far too much blind following of Gandhi in India by people who neglect his perpetual injunction to his own disciples that they should think for themselves. In all periods of history blind followers of great men tend to pick upon external and unessential things, the things a stupid, rigid and unimaginative mind can most easily grasp. In India this generally means wearing *khaddar*, not smoking and not 'drinking',[1] three signs of a Congressman that are not infrequently found in conjunction with a hard and aggressive spirit and often with political faults that I prefer not to discuss here. But at Sabarmati I found at least four or five people who deeply understood the ideas of Gandhi and were giving those ideas new forms of expression, carrying the spirit of his message far beyond the limits of any particular plans which he had initiated. I left with less regret because I had arranged to spend a final night at the *ashram* on my way back

[1] The taboo with regard to drink has taken some curious forms. In Indian films, for example, a man may be seen pouring out his liquor and even lifting his glass; but the consummation, when it reaches his lips, must not be witnessed. This resembles the Anglo-American Bedroom Convention.

from Saurashtra, before going on to Delhi. I travelled on the 18th via Dhandhuka – the route I had followed when visiting Dholera in 1930.

Saurashtra is an old name, recently revived, for the Kathiawar peninsula, which will be found on the map to the north of Bombay. Though it does not appear large when compared with the rest of India, I made more than one night journey of eight or nine hours within its limits, and the population is about equal to that of Denmark. At one time a conglomeration of small principalities, the peninsula was unified in 1948 by the firm hand of Vallabhbhai Patel. It has indeed been one of the real achievements of Indian self-government (and particularly of Sardar Patel) that Indian States all over India, anachronistic survivals from the Middle Ages, too long perpetuated by British policy, have been amalgamated into a few solid blocks. While retaining the outward forms of monarchy, these consolidated states have been made to introduce constitutional forms of government. In the case of Kathiawar, where the principalities were welded into the United State of Saurashtra, a leading part was played by a public-spirited citizen, A. P. Pattani, who at this point enters my own story.

I must have met Anant Pattani in 1930, but it is pardonable that I should have forgotten the fact, because on that occasion he was merely accompanying his father, a man then known throughout India. Sir Prabhashankar Pattani was for many years *Diwan* of the small state of Bhavnagar, in Kathiawar. (*Diwan* is often translated as 'Prime Minister' – in fact it implies something nearer to 'Grand Vizier' or Chief Administrator, especially in a state where there is no Constitutional government, which was at that time the case at Bhavnagar.)

Old Sir Prabhashankar had been at the same school as Gandhi, and they were life-long friends, though Pattani was as 'respectable', by official standards, as Gandhi was emphatically not. This made it the more remarkable that the venerable *Diwan* of Bhavnagar should have chosen to visit his old friend on the very night before the Salt March began. It certainly puzzled the British press.[1]

I well remember the scene – the vast throng at the *ashram* and in the road outside. I had made my way through the crowd to Gandhi's

[1] 'Thoughtful onlookers are wondering what lies behind conversations . . . between Mr Gandhi and Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, who it is thought may be a Government intermediary.' Bombay correspondent of the *Daily News*, March 12th, 1930.

house, and saw him greet the white-bearded stranger. Somebody told me who he was and explained that he had come to give his blessing to Bapu before the march began – a daring thing indeed for anyone in Sir Prabhashankar's position, for British Rule alone kept the Indian princes in existence, and a prince – let alone his minister – could be sacked for insubordination as easily as an office boy. Only the extraordinary prestige of Sir Prabhashankar, as a man acknowledged to be one of the shrewdest statesmen in India, must have saved him on that occasion; for on the following morning he even walked a few hundred yards with Gandhi and the Salt Marchers – which was carrying his gesture somewhat far.

But the picture that stands out in my memory is that of Gandhi facing two white-bearded figures – Sir Prabhashankar and old Abbas Tyabji, the latter (as an ex-Chief of Justice of Baroda) having taken even greater risks in his association with this professional law-breaker. Suddenly Gandhi's hands shot upwards, to seize the two beards and draw the heads of the two old men together. He said something in Gujerati, which caused some laughter, and I asked for a translation. 'Bapu says,' I was told, 'that these two beards signify Hindu-Moslem unity.'

On my arrival in Bombay, in 1949, I had met Pattani Junior at Government House. Anant had succeeded his father as Diwan of Bhavnagar in 1937 and administered the State for ten years. Eventually he had advised the Maharajah to establish constitutional government and shortly afterwards he had played a leading part in bringing the princes of Kathiawar together in the Convention which led to their abdication *en masse*, the Maharajah of Bhavnagar having already given the lead. In 1949 A. P. Pattani was a private citizen, taking no part in politics or in the administration of the newly formed State of Saurashtra. But he was interested in education, in various local societies and in people and things generally; also – as I was soon to discover – he was greatly respected throughout Saurashtra.

Even at Sabarmati I had been expected to 'perform'; and though my hosts there had been very considerate I had not escaped from addressing the school children, with the help of an interpreter. I had also spoken to the students of the *Vidyapith* (National University) who were able to follow me in English. (The Gujerat *Vidyapith*, a nationalist institution which had been functioning in 1929–30, is near Sabarmati *ashram*. The headmaster there had proved to be one

of the original staff and one of the few of my old acquaintances still in the neighbourhood.) I had become somewhat wary, as I had no wish to involve myself in the internal politics of India, and my talk to the school children had, to my astonishment, appeared at length in a local Gujerati paper – whether accurately reported or otherwise I had no idea. It was therefore rather a shock when I arrived at Bhavnager, after a long day's journey, hot, dirty, tired and hungry, to find that I was expected to address a public meeting that night. Anant Pattani had apparently mentioned it in Bombay, but all my memories of Bombay were chaotic. As my train was an hour late I was driven direct to the hall where the meeting was to be held – it had, in fact, been in progress for some time. Two other delegates to our conference had fortunately arrived in time to fill the gap; but as I was the only advertised speaker and the others were already answering questions I was introduced almost immediately. The audience, I was told, consisted mainly of students and professional people, who all understood English, so that no translation would be necessary.

Muttering 'God help me' (with more than usual fervour) I rose to my feet without a solitary thought in my head. The subject announced was our Conference – which had not yet taken place. I began to explain my difficulties, apologetically. It was a typical Indian hall, with high rafters where pigeons sat and heckled. I looked vaguely at the pigeons, which filled me with a great nostalgia; for in the old, old days at Sabarmati pigeons had nested in the eaves and cooed day-long as they flew in and out of my little cell. Suddenly two of the birds began a violent brawl and most of my audience looked up to see what was going on. 'Yes,' I said, 'even pacifists quarrel.' And with those words I found myself. It was quite a good meeting after all.

The two delegates who had so providentially appeared in time to entertain my audience were old friends of the *Jal Azad*. One was a Dutch pastor who had known the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp on account of the help he had given to Jews in Holland. The other was a Dane, long interested in India, who had also made a special study of Tolstoy's writings and was extremely well-informed with regard to Soviet Russia and the social history of his own country. We soon discovered that his accounts of Producers' Co-operation in Denmark and of the Folks' High Schools created more interest than anything that my Dutch friend and I had to say – at

least this was the case in the numerous schools which we later visited in Saurashtra. So we made a habit of pushing Aage Jörgensen forward whenever there was a request that we should speak. The Aage Khan (as I named him on account of his girth) never seemed to accustom himself to the idea that he was in a land where bananas were plentiful – a subject which continued to enthrall him so greatly that we always waited to hear some reference to bananas in his speeches. In this we were never disappointed. His eloquence on the subject was such that at Porbandar he was presented with an enormous quantity of bananas and somewhat disappointed the donor by giving them away to some poor children.

The three of us toured Saurashtra with Anant Pattani and an Indian doctor, who was in charge of the medical service of the State railways. Like Pattani, he proved to be excellent company – and very useful, too, when I had to struggle simultaneously with a heavy programme and an even heavier cold in the head. In the latter stages of that tour, in fact, Dr Vaidya more or less mothered me, saving me from many visitors and some of my engagements when I had become too exhausted to cope with anything or anybody.

There are numerous state guest houses in Saurashtra – originally used by the various princes to entertain their guests – and it was in these that we now stayed as guests of the Government. On the long train journeys A. P. Pattani would provide endless entertainment, informing us about the places and people. Often he would produce some apt and unusual story to illustrate a point. The stories might be from the ancient Hindu scriptures or from his own memories of Cambridge and travels on the Continent. Even more often they were stories about his father or tales which he had heard the old man tell.

'My father used to say . . .' I only remember a few of those stories. One concerned the difference between London, Paris and Port Said. In London, Sir Prabhashankar had assured his son, a policeman raised his little finger and all the traffic stopped. In Paris the policeman waved his arms in all directions and the traffic went all round him. In Port Said also the policeman waved his arms and the traffic drove straight over him. . . . I liked to think of that venerable, white-bearded statesman solemnly imparting these Facts of Life to his son.

Once, when one of our party, by an injudicious word, had let himself in for an engagement and was complaining about it, Anant

Pattani looked up and said: 'Why did you speak?' After a pause he added, 'My father had a story which explains my meaning. I don't know where he found it. Quite likely he made it up. There was a young prince who, in a previous incarnation, had just failed to qualify for Nirvana by speaking on one occasion when he should have been silent. As a special Heavenly dispensation the prince was born with a memory of this unfortunate episode, so that he might learn from the experience. He took full advantage of the concession and decided never to speak a word from the time of his birth, in order to be on the safe side.

'The old rajah was deeply afflicted to find that his son was apparently dumb. He offered a large reward to any person who could make the prince speak, but nobody succeeded. Then, when the prince was a young man, he went out with some huntsmen. They startled a partridge, and the foolish bird, instead of keeping still in the bush where it was sitting, made a frightened noise. Instantly a *shikari* drew his bow and shot into the bush. As they brought back the dying bird the prince murmured "Why did you speak?"

'Of course, the huntsmen heard him. They returned in triumph to the palace to claim the reward. The rajah sent for the young prince, but nothing would induce him to say another word. Then, as you will expect, the rajah became suspicious and presently he said in great anger: "These men are impostors. They have lied to me in order to obtain the reward. Take them away and cut off their heads."

'One huntsman threw himself on his face before the prince, begging him to save his life. "You know," he said, "that you *did* speak in the forest. And now, because I have told your father, I am to die." The prince looked down on him with infinite pity and great sadness. And then he said again: "Why did you speak?"'

Travelling with A. P. Pattani was, in fact, a series of crowded days followed by Arabian Nights of curious anecdotes from history and from a very mixed bag of mythology. Somehow in that week we found time for a good deal of sight-seeing, and I even climbed two mountains. At Palitana I went up the Golden Mountain, sacred to the Jains, in company with a young Jain who explained the mysteries of his religion. By the time we reached the summit of Satrunja all I had really learned was that Jains did not believe in God or Gods but worshipped a large number of them. Incalculable

labour had been spent in making the steep mountain path as uninteresting as possible by laying it out in endless flights of steps – a very common custom in India. Up these steps straggled a long line of pilgrims, some of them carried in *doolis* (chairs, slung on long poles). Two *dooli-wallahs* seemed to be considered sufficient for all but the very heaviest passengers, and (to my amazement) it had even been taken for granted that I should prefer to travel this way myself.

After climbing I forget how many thousand steps, well into the heat of the day, we reached the City of Temples, which crowns this mountain. Nobody lives in this 'city' – though no other word can convey its size. Two thousand feet below us, on all sides, lay the plains of Saurashtra, from which the Golden Mountain rises abruptly. Before us was this great walled city, with its street of Jain temples, some on high terraces, from which we were soon to look down on sharp flights of steps that wound their way among the riot of temples immediately below us. Whether the Jains believe in God or not they have certainly been at great pains to invent him, and at great expense in their worship. Cool at last within the chiselled walls and among the chilly idols, we stood on floors of intricate design, strewn with fresh flowers. (Jain temples, by the way, are scrupulously clean; which is more than can be said of some others.) There was the powerful odour of incense. Clanging bells mingled with strange chants. Ceremonially a Jain monk would light the lamps and devotees would touch the forehead of God with saffron and cedar wood. I was assured later that the staring eyes of the Jain idols were made in Germany – another blow to Birmingham.

No leather is allowed inside this city. Your shoes you doff, as a matter of course. But watchers at the gate will also require you to remove a leather belt, and hold up your breeks as best you may. Among the 1,100 temples (comprising 16,000 shrines) we were taken to one where there stood the carved figure of a camel. It was, I was told, an act of merit to crawl between his back legs and back through the front ones, because only those who could do this could be sure of Heaven. Being a human hairpin I made sure; but the heavy freights of the *dooli-wallahs* stood no chance at all. Later they showed us some of God's jewellery – his crown and vast ear-rings, his breast-plate and his armlets, all of Gargantuan proportions, wrought in gold and studded with precious stones. There was the inevitable and awe-inspiring accountancy, for few Indians can resist

the fascinating theme of *lakhs* and *crores* when exhibiting a temple or a trinket. As one has first to remember what *lakhs* and *crores* are, and then to divide by thirteen (a most awkward number) to obtain the value in sterling, these impressive figures mean nothing to me except that I like to watch the look of reverence on the faces of those who utter them. (I feel much sympathy with my wife's point of view; for I remember when an American once gave her some imposing figures in dollars Ethel put the whole dollar racket in its place with one simple question: 'Now what's that *in money?*')

I will not discuss at this stage the various educational institutions which we visited on that tour. But something should be said about Junagadh, where we arrived after a night's travelling, on November 20th. The city of Junagadh was formerly the capital of a State, known by the same name, where a Moslem prince ruled over a predominantly Hindu population. He was also surrounded by Hindu States ruled by Hindus, so that his decision (in 1947) to bring his own State into the Moslem group, as part of Pakistan, was hardly judicious. This prince, however, had not been noted for wisdom, but was chiefly celebrated for the hundreds of dogs which he kept, celebrating dog marriages with pomp and decorum at the Royal Palace. When his zeal for Pakistan led to a revolution he left hurriedly for the land of his dreams, taking with him most of his dogs but only the *crême de la crême* of his harem.

Among the places which we visited at Junagadh was an old fortress on the hill, outside the town. Here we were shown two wells of great depth and immense breadth, with steps that led down to the water level, the worn and slippery stairways lit only by occasional windows opening into the walls. At the bottom were mysterious passages; and it was not difficult to believe the story of a rajah who had been besieged in this fort and made his way by a secret tunnel to a neighbouring mountain. This mountain – Mount Girnar – is another place of pilgrimage, with many Jain temples, and we climbed it before leaving those parts. It is higher than the Golden Mountain of Palitana (3,500 feet); and I was not surprised, after sweating up its steep slopes, to hear that there was 'unrest' among the local *dooli-wallahs* regarding their rates of pay. In spite of starting at 6.30 a.m. and climbing from the western side, I found the 10,000 steps a warm journey, especially after we came out into the full blaze of the sun.

Talking of which, it is interesting, after twenty years, to note how

few people now wear the solar *topee*. First it was considered necessary for Europeans all the year round, if they were to avoid sunstroke. From that it became part of the Englishman's uniform, later adopted by Indians in official positions. On my last visit I saw very few Europeans wearing sun-helmets, for which there is no need in the winter; but some Indians were still using them as badges of their status in the service of the government or of the railways.

In addition to temples Mount Girnar offered, near its summit, the attractions of a bazaar with numerous booths where the reckless could drink tea and other concoctions. I call it tea out of courtesy – it is a horrible drink in which water, milk and sugar are all boiled together with tea-leaves. The view from Mount Girnar was even finer than that which we had so much admired from the Golden Mountain. A. P. Pattani, who had not accompanied us on the climb, met us as we descended and took us the same evening to see the famous Asoka Edicts – one of those rock inscriptions of the third century B.C. which are a lasting monument to the greatest and best of India's past rulers.

I was provided later, by the kindness of Dr Vaidya, with a full translation of the Pali script carved in that rock at Junagadh. The first edict prohibits the slaughter of animals. The second records that in all Asoka's dominions, 'as far as Tamraparni, the kingdom of Antiochus the Grecian King', sick men and animals were cared for and that 'where useful herbs for men and cattle were wanting he has caused them to be brought and planted.' He had also caused the planting of roots and trees (including fruit trees) and the digging of wells. The king exhorted his subjects to practice liberality, non-violence and 'abstinence from prodigality and slander.'

'His kettle-drum has become a summons to righteousness,' says the fourth edict; and in the fifth we read of 'superintendents of morals' (*Dharma Mahamatra*) whose grim title is qualified by the description of their functions. They were 'to loosen the bonds of those who are bound and liberate those who are confined' (one thinks inevitably of the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah) also 'to give encouragement to the charitable.' The king had discovered that 'the most worthy pursuit is the prosperity of the whole world.' He was an internationalist, indeed, and desired his great-grandsons to 'labour for the universal good; but this is difficult without extreme exertion.' He advocated toleration, reproved superstition and commended above all things 'sincere charity'. Asoka concluded that

'the conquest which bringeth joy springing from pleasant emotions becometh joy itself; the victory of virtue is happiness.' In a final edict he admitted a certain amount of redundance, evidently arising out of sheer poetic exuberance: 'Repetitions occur also, in a certain measure, on account of the agreeableness of various points.' He warned the reader, however, regarding the unreliability of his stenographers. If anything, he said, was written 'incompletely or not in order, it is because care has not been taken to make a good transcript or by the fault of the copyist' – meaning the stone-engraver, the equivalent of the modern compositor.

Our Hindu hosts, with good reason, regarded this ancient inscription with great reverence. It meant to them all that was best and greatest in their religion and their history. Hinduism was never a persecuting religion, and so far as Hindus are responsible one must look elsewhere for the causes of communal riots – not to any desire of Hindus to convert others by force, but to the activities of interested parties in creating, and playing upon, the fear that Hinduism is in danger. It is fear that has been fostered by centuries of foreign rule – by persecution under the Moghuls and by Christian missionaries who were too often scornful and 'superior', as well as being closely associated with the British Raj.

It was at Junagadh, however, where there had been, so recently, a clash between the Hindu population and their Moslem prince, that I saw A. P. Pattani go out of his way to do a kindness to a Moslem. He was a complete stranger, but Pattani muttered apologetically: 'These people were everybody and now they are nobody – I can't help sympathising with the under-dog in any situation.' And it was at Junagadh, as we came down Mount Girnar, that I saw Dr Vaidya turn aside by a little row of shrines, placed there for the *puja* of the Hindus and the worship of the Jains. He spoke with a man and I noticed that once his voice was raised, as though to reprimand him. He explained, when I asked what was said: 'There used to be a place there for the Moslems, too. Now it has gone. I asked that man what had happened to the Imam, and he said the Moslem had gone away. A good job, he said. I told him he had no business to talk like that. Ours is a secular State, and we have room for everyone. The man apologised – he said he shouldn't have spoken that way, so we parted friends.'

These men – Pattani and the doctor – did not profess to be followers of Gandhi. They only admired from a distance. Yet often

in things I saw them do or heard them say I felt that Gandhi's teachings could be traced; or perhaps it was the spirit of Asoka and the ancient sages, if one can really distinguish between Gandhiji and his spiritual ancestry. India is a land of unexpected things. It was a professing Gandhi-wallah who said to me with sudden ferocity: 'We are non-wiolent. But these people' (meaning the Pakistanis) 'are *not* non-wiolent. *And if they attack us we shall crush them in a fortnight.*' Yet Anant Pattani, who stood afar off, like the publican in the parable, practised the virtues he did not profess to an astonishing degree. 'I am no pacifist,' he would say. 'I kept law and order, and that means force. In Bhavnagar I used to put Congressmen in prison.' And then he would laugh.

He had reason to laugh, for we often met those men he had imprisoned – many of them now among the rulers of Saurashtra. And now that he was elderly and powerless they greeted him as a father and a friend. So did peasants, students and schoolchildren. He was one of the few exceptions – an administrator of the *ancien régime* who had ruled benignly,[1] resigned gracefully and accepted the new order with good will. Was it because of the personal friendship with Gandhi which he, and his father before him, had so long enjoyed? This, at least, I know – that when he advised the Maharajah of Bhavnagar to abdicate he took that step on Gandhi's advice, having specially visited him for consultation.

The train from Junagadh rumbled and creaked on its journey to the coast. Lying on his bunk opposite me the ex-*Diwan* was engaged in his favourite pastime. 'There is a story,' he was saying, 'by the philosopher Chandrakant. . . .' The story concerned a Brahmin who saw a scorpion drowning in a river as he sat on the bank. Three times he tried to rescue it and three times the creature stung the hand which would have helped him. 'You fool,' remarked a man who was watching. 'Don't you know that it is the nature of a scorpion to sting?' The Brahmin stretched out his arm again. 'Yes,' he replied, 'and it is my nature to save its life.'

Pattani Sahib finished the story with his usual chuckle. 'I don't pretend to follow it,' he said, 'but I suppose that's a good parable of pacifism. I can't see far enough to tell you whether it will work, but

[1] Bhavnagar was one of the best administered States; and in education, social services, etc, it compared very favourably with 'British India', also with most other Indian States. I was interested to notice that Pattani, from a long experience of Indian princes, compared them favourably with Indian capitalists.

I can tell you that our way has failed. If the world doesn't find some other way we are finished. I am old, and it doesn't matter to me. But you are young enough to experiment. Good luck to you.'

Propped up with pillows (he was suffering badly from asthma) the G.O.M. of Saurashtra fell asleep, his fine features still wearing a smile, half kindly, half cynical. He had given me, as usual, a great deal to think about. And my thoughts were not inappropriate to the occasion, for the train was carrying us to Porbandar, the birthplace of Gandhi. Sabarmati had been my first place of pilgrimage, and this was, in my reckoning, the second.

CHAPTER EIGHT

... I was then perswaded, & remained confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God.

BLAKE

IT WOULD be unfair to Porbandar to say that I found it disappointing. The fault probably began in my own head, in the form of a cold, and in my natural desire, having at last reached the sea again, to swim in it. The holy waters of Porbandar seemed to lack curative properties; and from the time of that bathe I found it increasingly difficult to cope with our heavily programmed tour. But I remember with pleasure the guest house on the shore, the sound of the breaking waves at night and the deep sigh of the receding sea, in which I joined.

We visited the house where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had made his first appearance. It was quite a small house, though Gandhiji's father had then been *Diwan* of Porbandar – but Porbandar was not a large State. The *Diwan* used to talk to visitors in the courtyard from an upper window. It was safer, apparently. Next door the Gandhi Memorial was already nearing completion – a building that was to serve many useful purposes, such as housing a library, an *Ayurvedic* clinic and a school. Our doctor friend, whose training was orthodox, went over the clinic with me (for that part of the building was already complete) and I watched with interest while he examined the little bottles, listening as he discussed their contents and uses with the young dispenser. He expressed satisfaction and spoke with knowledge and appreciation of the ancient *Ayurvedic* system. Before leaving the Memorial I laid a stone, assisted by Dr Vaidya. Like my comma in the letter to Lord Irwin, this single stone (lost among so many) seemed to me a well-proportioned and well-chosen symbol.

Somehow I found time to go out in a canoe – persuading an urchin to let me accompany him – and even to take a brief sail with some fishermen in a *dhow*, so as to examine the use of the curious rigging of these boats. The Heir Apparent of Porbandar was still living in the palace where the rajahs of this little state had lived and

ruled. He invited our party there and on the following day drove us to a summer residence of his in the hills, where we saw well-cut lawns and plenty of bougainvillea, also a number of cranes which – we were told – came every year from Russia. The ex-royalties of Saurashtra had, it will be observed, been dealt with very generously. They retained much of their property, plus a pension amounting to ten per cent of the previous State revenues, with a maximum limit of ten *lakhs* of rupees per annum. (A *lakh* is a hundred thousand and a *crore* is ten millions. To make it more difficult Indians mess about with the commas, so that a *lakh* is written in figures as 1,00,000 and a *crore* as 1,00,00,000.) On the whole, the worst scoundrels among the princes came off best, as they had over-taxed their subjects and did quite well on ten per cent, without any administrative expenses. But maybe the deal was worth while, and it saved a great deal of trouble. A sliding scale of progressive reductions for heirs will ultimately wipe out this charge on the revenues of Saurashtra.

The young ex-Prince himself we found pleasant and generous, though I did wish that he could have put his training, at an agricultural college, to some practical use in a country that so badly needs men trained in better methods of farming. Some other ex-potentates, or their hangers-on, appear to have accepted the new order less gracefully, turning to brigandage. The day I left Saurashtra one of the railway junctions was looted by dacoits believed to have been 'royalists'. We heard a good deal about dacoits in Saurashtra, also about panthers and lions (this being one of the few parts of India where lions are still to be found). However we did not meet any of these beasts of prey. There are no tigers in those parts, the tiger and the lion not being on speaking terms.

At Porbandar there lived an industrial magnate whose determination to entertain us was equalled only by that of the ex-Prince. I found that he was one of the owners of the Indian ginning mills in Uganda; and knowing that the Indian monopoly of this industry had been a serious source of friction between the Indian settlers and the native Africans, I decided to ask a few questions. As I feared, the old man was not very communicative on this subject, but he told me of a plan he had to found a university in Uganda, where the first consideration would be the allocation of free places to Africans. This, at least, seemed to have some useful possibilities; so I responded encouragingly and suggested the names of friends in East Africa who might be consulted.

This old capitalist seemed to have quite a passion for education, and to have been generous in his efforts to further it. We were taken to see the big girls' boarding school which he had founded and heavily endowed. Having seen, by then, a number of 'Basic' schools I was not suitably impressed by the expensive equipment, the buildings or the nature of the education – I was also surprised by the relatively high cost per head, in spite of the generous endowment. But what most depressed me was the sight of a whole row of dummy rifles, used by the girls in their physical training. (One of our conference delegates, who had a similar experience in another Indian girls' school, mentioned later how he had made some comment and asked what the dummy rifles were for. The apologetic reply was that real ones were unobtainable.) The *Arya Kanya Gurukul* at Porbandar, however, had many good points – especially the freedom allowed to the girls.

There was a long concert and speech-making occasion at that school, where we were each expected to perform, on our first evening at Porbandar. We had gone through a heavy programme, my cold and the proceedings were becoming increasingly tedious, and I was quite determined not to play. When at last my turn came to speak, phrase by phrase, with Anant Pattani translating, I had already observed with sympathy that many of the smaller girls were yawning. I told them that I had noticed this and that a good yawn would help us all. It proved much easier than speaking and avoided any necessity for further translation. We just enjoyed a little mass yawning, led from the platform.

My pleasantest memory of Porbandar was of some vigorous (and very good) sword dancing by peasants before we left on the following day. They wore the distinctive costume of Kathiawar – pyjamas with a shirt and a short, frilled tunic. These are generally white, though sometimes (on ceremonial occasions such as this) coloured clothes are worn. This local dress is unique and very decorative.

Gandhi's father apparently moved up the line to Rajkot when young Mohandas was five and took a job as *Diwan* there, so it was to Rajkot that we travelled next – another night journey – after the two days at Porbandar. At about 7 a.m. we were met at the station by a Reception Committee, complete with garlands and a cyclostyled agenda of the day's fun and games, which accounted for every quarter-hour of our time. The programme was to include a visit to a 'Destitute Home for Women'. Our party, as the ring-side

reporters say, had taken heavy punishment; but we wearily set off for fresh receptions and more sight-seeing. Among the places we visited was the house where the Gandhi family had lived after they moved from Porbandar – and indeed, it had continued to be a family home, for here we met Bapu's older sister, Faiba, aged eighty-seven. She had once lived at one of the *ashrams* with her brother – Sabarmati, I suppose – but had left when Gandhiji introduced 'untouchables' into the fold. Caste prejudice had proved too strong. It must have been one of the minor tragedies of his life to be deserted by one of his own family on such an issue; and I remembered what John Woolman had said about the snares of 'natural affection' – and Christ himself, in more than one passage. A really great man has to be big enough to accept all that sort of thing as part of the price paid. The old lady cried a little and I felt sorry for her, even though I wondered – well, I wondered about a good many things.

That evening I left for Ahmedabad. My two European friends I was soon to see again, but it was sad saying 'goodbye' to Anant Pattani and Dr Vaidya. Somehow, in the way that some folks do on these occasions – when one can hardly say *aufwiedersehen* with any confidence – they made it easier than I expected. That, of course, was just typical of their perfect courtesy throughout the Saurashtra tour. '*Ram Ram*' was our farewell – the peasant salutation which they had taught me.

Once more it was late when I arrived at Sabarmati, glad to see my friends there again, however briefly, but sorry that my plans made it necessary for me to leave again early in the morning, after four hours' sleep. I came only to break the journey to the north, and to collect the rest of my luggage, for I had travelled Saurashtra with nothing but my roll of bedding and my portfolio, from which I am inseparable.

I heard that my German friend Kraschutzki, who had arrived at Sabarmati shortly before I left for Bhavnagar, had been to see the local prison – the same at which I had once visited Sardar Patel. My friend had been favourably impressed, which meant something, as he knew a good deal about prisons, from the inside. Perhaps Patel and his colleagues, working on the same inside knowledge, had done something to improve the system – I hope so, though I never found time on this trip to visit any jails myself. I did, however, as explained later, meet some prison warders in very interesting circumstances.

Once more it was hard to say goodbye. Here I had been able to feel the past and yet to appreciate the growth and development – to realise something really important: that this place was in many ways better even than it had been in Gandhi's time. I appreciated the greater emphasis on culture and (in prayer times) on silence. That was as it should be and as Bapu would have had it – no static discipleship, but a community capable of evolution and of 'experimenting with Truth' as he had always done himself. And yet I wish I could feel as confident about all those in charge of this *ashram* as I do about some whom I have mentioned; for there were one or two even here who seemed to me to have little real understanding or appreciation of the man to whose memory they paid so much reverence.

One small thing with which this thought is linked in my mind is the use of memorial tablets relating to Gandhiji and his nephew Magunlal. There was a lushness, a vulgarity about the inscriptions which Gandhi would never have tolerated. Later I realised increasingly what a mistake had been made. By making Gandhiji little short of a god many people in India have found it easier to excuse themselves for not following his teachings. One law for the lion and the ox is oppression; and to apply the moral standard of an *Avatar* to ordinary human beings is not fair – that, in effect, is how they argue.

But those who knew Bapu – or have even read his autobiography – must know that he was a very ordinary man who became a saint by setting himself impossible standards and then seeking spiritual power to live up to them. His whole life was spent in an effort to achieve the same miracle on the widest possible social scale; and those who suggest that he had natural gifts which gave him an unfair advantage imply that he was a hypocrite. If they are right, then Gandhi's demands on frail human nature were as fraudulent as those advertisements which show pictures of muscular giants with the assurance that anyone can develop the same muscle-bound torso by taking a few pills. Gandhi's own claim was that his teachings were not 'merely for the *Rishis* and saints', but for the common people; and to a large extent his greatness stands or falls upon the truth or untruth of that statement. Speaking from his own religious experience he would have said that to deny it was plain blasphemy.

Already attempts are being made to 'explain away' much of

Gandhi's essential teaching. Any ambiguous phrase is seized upon and any isolated statement, though his whole life should deny it. Gandhi did make some statements which I should not hesitate to describe as foolish. I think, for example, that his description of the Polish resistance to Germany in 1939 as 'almost non-violent' was about as foolish as anything that a wise man ever said. Yet it is upon such isolated sayings that the revisionists rely in their attempts to modify the lesson of Gandhi's life, which was his real message to the world. I have even heard non-violence described by a great devotee of the Mahatma as a purely mental attitude which (somehow) was quite compatible with any amount of slaughter.

There were at least two revisionists, as I call them, even at Sabarmati; and it was my misfortune that one of them insisted on seeing me off at the station when I left for Delhi. The sadness of it was that there came with us the art master, who never spoke a word – indeed, he had no opportunity. He and I were both silent, while the other man went into a confused diatribe against Pakistan and enlarged upon an astonishing theory of Gandhi's murder, which – it appeared – had been engineered for no known purpose by the Aga Khan, General Smuts, Winston Churchill and others. . . . The moment that the train had pulled out of Ahmedabad station two Hindus sharing my compartment very promptly assured me that the whole story (which they had overheard) was nonsense, in case I should have been inclined to give it credit. It was decent of them, but I fear that I must still look very green.

As we left Ahmedabad I had a good view of a refugee camp. From the railway it appeared to be well arranged and equipped, and I regretted that I had not found time to visit it. We had now a twenty-four hour stretch before us, along the line that I had travelled in 1930 with Gandhiji's letter to Irwin. 'We' included my two European companions of the Saurashtra tour, who joined the train during the day, having travelled overnight by another route. It was interesting to sort our impressions of things and people – for them these were first impressions of India and had proved somewhat bewildering. (I was not too clear about it all myself – there seemed to be so many things that were mutually contradictory.) It had been really hot in Saurashtra but not too hot for me to enjoy it. As we continued on our way northwards that night one could feel the change in temperature. On a winter visit what I most dread in India is cold, for houses are built to keep the sun out and let the

draughts in. There is rarely a fire, because most Indians do not seem to bother; and if there is, the heat gets lost somewhere up by the high ceiling or creeps out through one of the curtained doorways. I shuddered as we approached Delhi in the dim, chilly dawn.

However, my luck was in – I was to stay, it appeared, with the Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, probably the most distinguished woman in India and Minister of Health in the present Government. I was surprised to find that jackals roamed at night in the Governor General's enclosure, where I was staying. After dark they could be clearly heard – their howls not unlike the wailing of cats, except that cats generally favour duets, whereas jackals produce a full choir. As I spent most of my time in Delhi having some kind of gastric influenza I certainly landed in the right place. The Minister of Health took my temperature, which is more than Aneurin Bevan ever did for me (even if he knows how to, which I consider doubtful) and I was looked after with the utmost kindness by my hostess and her brother – Colonel Singh, a retired army doctor. Before this sudden collapse I had been whirled around on the usual sightseeing tours to gaze at places like the Red Fort, which I felt I had quite adequately seen on my previous visit (and I could not believe it had substantially changed in twenty years, having endured so much and so long). But I did manage to meet my old friends the Chaturvedis and found Chats like a caged tiger. Having reached the very top of his profession he had ended up in an office at New Delhi after a life-time of freedom in the forests.

There were two new 'sights' in Delhi which I was taken to see before whatever bug it was attacked me. One was the Birla Mandir, which one could dismiss for the vulgarity of its architecture but for the one really interesting thing about it. For, at a time when 'temple entry' for 'untouchables' was still a live issue, this place was built especially as an example: it was to be open to all. For that reason Gandhi himself gladly opened it. The other new 'sight' was in the garden of G. D. Birla's house, where Gandhiji had been staying when he was assassinated. With the desire to reconstruct in my mind the events of the final Act I visited this place, already a place of pilgrimage, though it remains at present in private hands. A stone marks the spot where Gandhi fell; and I am glad to say that there is no inscription except the last two words which he was heard to utter: *Haré Ram*. 'Hail God' was his welcome to Death.

By being ill I missed another reception to Nehru – a big affair at

the Red Fort – and escaped the press. I had not been much pestered by journalists since I left Bombay. I also managed to catch up with a little outside news. The Constituent Assembly, which had been drafting the Constitution for the Indian Republic, had ended on the very morning of my arrival in Delhi – in fact, but for our train being late, my two companions and I would have been 'in at the death'. As it was we had arrived to find an empty hall. But lying in bed later I was able to read with interest the product of the Assembly's deliberations. It was a tedious and uninspired document, full of florid phrases which meant little or nothing, and it should have ended 'that government of lawyers by lawyers and for lawyers may not perish from the earth.' What someone (was it Baldwin?) said of Lord Simon is true of almost any lawyer: 'He is a big man on a small point and a small man on a big point.' The new Indian Constitution had clearly been drafted by such people.

I looked with special interest at the section dealing with the detention of suspects – just to see how Dr Ambedkar[1] and his colleagues had legalised imprisonment without trial and at the same time reconciled it with all the high-falutin' stuff in the pompous preamble. It would take up too much valuable space to quote the actual verbiage; but anybody who doubts my summary can check it for himself. Boiled down to plain English, the four relevant clauses said (believe it or not) when stripped of padding:

(1) No person is to be imprisoned without a proper trial and conviction.

(2) Notwithstanding this a person may be imprisoned without either.

[1] The responsibility given to Dr Ambedkar, both in the Government of the country and the drafting of the Constitution, must be a matter for astonishment. Granted that he has ability, his only other qualifications are that he spent most of his life as a vindictive opponent of Gandhi and Congress – particularly of Gandhi's efforts to help the 'untouchables'. These efforts Ambedkar consistently and unscrupulously misrepresented, claiming to be the 'leader' of the 'untouchables' because the British rulers had appointed him (for reasons best known to themselves) as the Government-nominated 'representative' of the 'depressed classes' in the Legislature. At the Round Table Conference (in 1931) he even combined with the Aga Khan and the European and Anglo-Indian delegates in a 'pact' against Gandhi. Notwithstanding a decisive defeat in the 1937 elections (when Ambedkar's party won only nine per cent of the seats reserved for the 'depressed classes') he continued to be regarded by the British Government and the British press as the representative of those classes. During the war his long services were rewarded by Ministerial rank in the Government. That the people whom he and his colleagues then imprisoned should, on such a record, trust him as they have done, proves their generosity but implies unusual credulity, for there are no visible signs of any change of heart.

(3) In such cases there is to be a hole-in-the-corner investigation after three months by a committee (not a court of law).

(4) Notwithstanding which, there need not even be that.

It is all very nauseating – the more so because, quoted by itself, the first of the four clauses might mislead any gullible person into thinking that all was well. As I have already explained, they do the same sort of thing in Pakistan. There the outlaws are Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his followers. In India the outlaws are, in most cases, suspected Communists.

One of my great disappointments in Bombay had been a discussion I had with leading members of the Socialist Party about detentions. Some Socialists had been detained without trial by the Indian Government and I thought the whole party would see the essential iniquity of the procedure. Instead I had found that they had no objection in principle to such detentions – they approved of them when applied to Communists and only objected when their own members were treated in the same way. I did meet later, at Itarsi (in the Central Provinces) a socialist editor who was also a pacifist and objected in principle to these internments. That, of course, is the test of sincerity in all protestations about freedom. All will agree in demanding rights for themselves and people of their own party; but we only show respect for those rights, as such, when we demand them for people radically opposed to our own point of view. I think my old friend Jaya Prakash would take this stand; but unfortunately when I eventually met him in Calcutta it was only for a few minutes, and we failed to meet again.

It would be ungenerous, and even unfair, to mention this evil without pointing out that it was inherited by both India and Pakistan from the British system. Under our rule the practice of detention without trial was a frequent subject for attacks on the Government, and quite rightly so. The tragedy is that those who led those attacks are now using the same discreditable methods. When discussing the matter with the Bombay Socialists I was met by references to similar procedure in Britain, during the war, and was very glad to be able to say that I had consistently opposed it. With us, as I explained, one had only, in those days, to suggest that a person was a Fascist and he was as good as damned. There was no legal definition of a Fascist or of Fascism, there was no law making Fascism an offence and there was no attempt to prove before a court that a suspected person was, in fact, a Fascist (whatever that

might be) or that he had committed or plotted any offence. I admitted the parallel between Regulation 18B and the Indian procedure, but tried to show that our own crimes and blunders were hardly a model to be copied.

It so happened that I was peculiarly well-equipped to deal with this question, as I had made a close study of the dictatorial powers wielded during the war by Sir John Anderson, and later by Herbert Morrison, with particular reference to certain individual cases. In at least one instance Regulation 18B was used to satisfy the personal spite of someone, who had failed to get his way in a court of law. He persuaded the authorities to intern a young woman for an offence after an Appeal Court had dismissed the whole affair as a foolish escapade committed years previously, when this girl was (in the words of the judge) 'no more than a child'. In another instance a man was interned because he knew too much about the way in which a certain Oil Magnate was sabotaging the 'War Effort' in his own interests – but the Oil Magnate had friends in the right place, and his victim had not. There were many other such cases, and probably a vast number of which I never knew. St John Philby, who was interned under this disgraceful regulation (presumably on the pretext that he was a potential traitor) actually had to be released in a great hurry in order that he might handle one of the most difficult diplomatic situations which arose in the Near East. If the Government knew that he could be trusted for this purpose, there must have been other (probably personal) reasons for his detention.

I had pointed out the implications of all this to the Socialists in Bombay, showing that where such powers existed they were bound to be abused. There is, in fact, absolutely no value to the Government in wielding such powers if it does not use them to put inconvenient people out of the way without the necessity of finding a true case against them. And when the power is available the administration is obviously not going to restrict its use merely to one group of its opponents. However, the Socialists did not agree. They were so vindictive about the Communists that they seemed ready to take the risk of sharing their fate.

In contrast to these depressing recollections, occasioned by the study of India's new Constitution, I found other news in the papers which gave me real satisfaction. Michael Scott had hit the headlines with his passionate appeal at Lake Success, on behalf of the tribes-

men of South-West Africa. I remembered him slightly from a casual meeting in London – a gaunt man with a far-away look in his eyes, as though he had perpetually in mind the sufferings of his African friends. And now, at last, he had made the whole world attend to his claim for justice. My own heart responded: I wished him well, half envying him a struggle in which I would so gladly have helped. Here I was in India, the country for which I too had fought, in my way and in my time. But here the struggle had reached a new phase – it was to be henceforward, as I had always maintained it ought to be, an internal struggle, a matter in which Indians alone must decide the destiny of their country. Those of us in Europe who really cared about freedom and justice should be looking now towards Africa. About the same time I read of the police firing on Trade Union demonstrations in Nigeria, which emphasised the same point. As I read the bland explanations of the Labour Government I recalled how the same people had done the same things and made the same excuses twenty years before, in India. In focussing attention now on the African continent I felt convinced that this man Scott was on to the right thing.

I could not have guessed that within a week I was to hear great news at Santiniketan. Michael Scott was flying to India, to attend the Sevagram sessions of our conference. The man whose task I had envied was soon to be my companion in many strange places. And in the very house where I was staying at New Delhi, it was to be my privilege to discuss with Michael and others the application of Gandhi's methods once more to the land where Gandhi first 'experimented with Truth'. Before I left India my mind was already turning to the needs of Africa and I was deeply absorbed in the plans of Michael Scott.

CHAPTER NINE

Icelle moyennant, sont les nations, que Nature sembloit tenir absconces, impérmeables et incongneues, à nous venues, nous à elles. . . . Taprobana a veu Lappia, Java a veu les mons Riphées, Phebol voyra Thélème; les Islandoys et Engronelands voyroit Euphrates.

RABELAIS

THE ABSENTEE curé of Meudon seems an odd sort of fellow to walk across these pages just now. The truth is that I was given a copy of John Cowper Powys's *Rabelais* just before I left England, and – in a fortunate moment – I decided to take it with me. Even my day journeys on trains were generally occupied with writing, and I never finished reading that book; but it was just the right corrective to the over-seriousness of so many conversations with Indians.

I quote the passage above because of a curious coincidence. When Vera Brittain and I jointly concocted an account of our week at Santiniketan – the first week of the World Pacifist Conference – we described the meeting of the delegates on the first day: 'Finland talked politics with Burma, New Zealand discussed conscription with France, and Malaya shared experiences with Mexico.' Not long after the writing of this report I read the passage in which Rabelais enumerated the virtues of the herb *Pantegruelion.* As Englished by J. C. Powys this reads: 'By means thereof the peoples that Nature seems to have kept hidden, unattainable and unknown, have come to us and we to them . . . Tabrobane has seen Lapland, Java has seen the Ripæan Mountains, Phebol shall see Thélème, and the Icelanders and Greenlanders shall see the Euphrates.' We met under the banner of Gandhi; but I am happy to think that we also fulfilled the prophesy of Rabelais and were not unprovided with *Pantegruelion.*

I travelled direct to Santiniketan from Delhi – some thirty hours' journey into West Bengal. It was not my first visit to the home of Rabindranath Tagore. On my way back from Calcutta, in 1930, I had – in spite of being pressed for time – spent a few days there and met the poet, whom I had found 'like his picture, only more so'.

In those days it had already been a great educational centre and international in its outlook. But my own comments, made at the time, indicate that I thought the place 'at its best where it is most purely Indian.' However, I had been impressed with the success of co-education in the school and university. Young men and women had seemed more at ease with one another than I had found them, even at Sabarmati, in 1930. I had also visited the agricultural college, Sriniketan, about two miles away in the village of Surul. Here they were already teaching village crafts as well as agriculture and I remember an amusing incident when two English officials (one of them the Bengal Education Secretary) arrived just as I had sat down at a spinning wheel and begun to try my hand. 'Where did you learn that?' asked one of these visitors, very surprised. 'At Gandhi's *ashram*,' I said, and went on spinning. As it was before the days of my notoriety it must have given him a bigger surprise than my spinning, which was never very good. (I found I had lost the art completely when I returned in 1949.)

My week at Santiniketan, in 1949, kept me so busy that I never revisited this sister institution – which was a pity, because I should then have been better able to form an opinion about the work there. In 1930 I had noted with satisfaction the efforts to teach the value of co-operation to the villagers and to give training in crafts whereby good use could be made of long enforced leisure in the summer months. They were also teaching the peasants how to fight malaria. But I was not so clear that the use of tractors at Sriniketan was a good (or even a possible) practice for the villagers to imitate. The top soil, being commonly not very deep, should only be lightly scratched in most parts of India; and only the wealthiest peasants could afford tractors, anyway. Apart from that, I should today regard with suspicion any innovations which made the Indian peasant less self-dependent. In a racket-ridden world of booms and slumps the less he buys and sells on the world market, the greater his security. And what he buys abroad – such as petrol for tractors – must be paid for by the export of agricultural produce, when every scrap of land is needed to feed the population.

Dr Tagore himself had not made such a deep impression on me at Santiniketan as he did on a later occasion in London. That second meeting deeply stirred me, and I have tried to recall the whole incident elsewhere.[1] My visit to Santiniketan in 1930 had been 'a

[1] *The Wisdom of John Woolman*, 1948, p.p. 65–66.

pleasantly confused impression of moonlight and mango-groves, fire-flies, boys playing football with bare feet, mixed classes of children in bright saffron clothes, sitting under the trees, and friendly argumentative students.' I had also noted the poet's face (rather than his words) among my impressions and his curiously constructed house ('It looks like a gallant ship when lit up at night'). The moon had been at the full and I had occupied an upper room in a guest house, with a balcony. As my journals very rightly say, 'It is ridiculous to attempt description to anyone who hasn't seen Indian moonlight or smelt mango-blossom. And if you have, description is superfluous.'

The Santiniketan to which I now returned was hardly the same thing. Most of the delegates were living in tents, though I soon had to be moved into a guest house owing to some more internal afflictions. Conference sessions were held in the poet's house, now occupied by a son of Rabindranath, but we had our meals in the open air, under a striped awning, in the middle of our camp. We had little opportunity to see much of the educational institutions, and in this respect I was worse off than most. It had been agreed that the press should not be admitted to our conference sessions, but that a statement should be issued daily by a Publicity Committee. Appointed chairman of this committee on the day of our arrival, I soon found that I had absolutely no leisure. The main work seemed to fall on Vera Brittain and myself, perhaps because we were the only English members of the committee, and less modest than the American members. Others claimed, with some plausibility, that as the proceedings and reports were in English, they felt unequal to the task of reporting. The job proved to be extremely involved, as a great many discussions took place which had to be handled with the greatest caution, so that several revised drafts were necessary sometimes before we gave our final 'hand-out' for the day to the press agencies. One reason for this caution was that many delegates came from countries where an injudicious report could have caused a great deal of trouble for them; so many of our summaries had to be discussed, phrase by phrase, with various speakers who had contributed to whatever session we were reporting.

I mention this press work first because, from my point of view, it was my principal activity for the whole of that week. The publicity results were far beyond our expectations, for many Indian daily papers published our reports in full (making up to two columns

a day) and often used them on the front page. I have already emphasised that India is no more pacifist than any other country; and it was one of the many paradoxes that we noticed in this country of contradictions that a pacifist conference should have been given such a good show in the press. Another paradox, of which we had no knowledge then, was that even while we were meeting at Santiniketan – which means literally 'The Abode of Peace' – some members of the staff were away on a military training course, preparatory to the introduction of compulsory military training for the students. This compulsory training began a few weeks after we left.

Of the students themselves we were very much aware. Before dawn they roused us from sleep with their songs, marching round the camp. In the dim light the early riser saw the scavengers at work – student volunteers again – cleaning up the camp. They waited on us at table. They patrolled the camp and watched at the gates, acting as guides and keeping out unauthorised persons. I was personally sorry – as I think most of the delegates were – that we were so pampered. It is true that we had plenty to do, and that, in my own case, I had letters and reports to write which kept me up so late that I rarely slept for more than four or five hours a night. But I think that with a little re-arrangement of our programme we could have found time for some of the camp 'chores' and that it would have been good for us all. One Indian student even expressed surprise on finding me washing some clothes; he said he had never known a European to do that. It seemed to me, in that case, that we were missing an opportunity to show that we *could* do something else besides talking.

Nearly a hundred delegates assembled at Santiniketan. Twenty-eight of these were from India, but they included Horace Alexander and three other 'domiciled Europeans' as such people used to be called. From Pakistan we had, originally, only two delegates – both Hindus and both from East Bengal. Useful as their contribution undoubtedly was, we were glad when a Moslem Professor from Dacca University joined us later, at Sevagram. We had, unfortunately, no delegate from West Pakistan, where feeling against India is so much stronger. But we had other Moslem delegates (from the Near East) who took a deep sympathetic interest in the work of reconciliation between their co-religionists in Pakistan and the predominantly Hindu population of the Indian Union. Over sixty delegates came to Santiniketan from outside these two

countries (the number was nearer seventy at Sevagram) and thirty-four countries altogether were represented. In our first bulletin we were able to give a formidable list of religions and occupations under which the delegates could be classified.

It was my bad luck to be ill on the second day of the conference, and unable to attend the session when one of my old comrades, Acharya Kripalani, gave what was evidently a memorable address. A gaunt figure with an almost Mephistophelian expression, especially when he smiles, Kripalani was quite the most amusing person I met when I first went to India. It was he who once 'translated' a speech of mine – a dull speech, too, as I realised even at the time. To my surprise, in the Hindi version every phrase had raised a fresh laugh. I have no idea what he told the audience, except that it must have had little or no relation to the speech he was supposed to be interpreting. Indeed, he later admitted this fact, looking more than ever like a stage version of the Prince of Darkness. For this and many other things I loved Kripalani, and after twenty years I found him unchanged. Still a member of Congress,[1] he was using his wit to lash his own leaders; and the Government, since nidependence was won, has had no sharper critic than this *franc-tireur*. One might almost compare him with Shaw; for, however unpopular his views may be, he is always sure of a good press on account of the original way in which he expresses them.

At Santiniketan, it seems, my old friend listened to some speeches which indicated, all too clearly, a sentimental and far too solemn appreciation of Gandhi. Kripalani, who had himself given up a great deal in order to work with the Mahatma, was the ideal person to do the necessary de-bunking of pious platitudes, and it seems he did so with zest. Non-violence, he told the delegates, was not rooted in sentimentality. Nor could it be found where there was fear, which had first to be uprooted. Gandhi had considered fear, rather than violence, the greatest evil. Gandhiji was a hard man (well I knew it!) but he would cleanse anything from a soul to a latrine. Kripalani seems to have given the delegates what was for many of them their first really live picture of Gandhi – the practical man who took everything in life into the scope of his philosophy and religion. Best of all, with so many Indians and others prepared to use the Mahatma as a measuring rod, he told them not to copy Gandhi, but to use their own initiative. What they needed was Gandhi's spirit and his

[1] He has since resigned and formed a new opposition party.

sense of urgency. It was the authentic stuff, all right, by all accounts – the real Gandhian Gospel.

In these pages, however, I shall not attempt to give a record of the conference. This book is an account of Gandhi as I knew him, of the problems he set out to solve and of the extent to which I traced permanent results of his work in the life of India. At Santiniketan I met, among the Indian delegates, many who deeply impressed me as people who were really trying to carry further the work which Gandhi had begun. First there was his own son, Manilal – a quiet, gentle man who edits a paper in South Africa. With him I made almost immediate contact, as he was greatly concerned about the frequent friction between Indian settlers and native Africans. It is perhaps worth mentioning here that, apart from that single instance at Porbandar (where the wicket was very sticky), I found educated Indians everywhere sympathetic to the African and very critical of those among the Indian settlers whom they regarded as responsible for the trouble between the two peoples. Those with whom I discussed the matter included Pandit Nehru himself, the Raj Kumari and her brother, Colonel Singh. I found their attitude greatly to their credit, for it showed not a trace of nationalist prejudice. Nehru has declared publicly that his government will not support any Indian interests in Africa which conflict with the rights of the native African people.

Another Indian who expressed himself strongly on this subject was my old friend Amiya Chakravarty, then a professor on the staff of a great Negro institution – Howard University (Washington, D.C.). Amiya, whom I had met at Santiniketan in 1930, and later in England, had been Tagore's secretary. He was among the delegates and so was his Principal, Dr Mordecai Johnson – a big man in every way, who ultimately made, I think, a deeper personal impression on that conference than any other individual. However, Mordecai is a Negro and I am thinking at the moment of the Indians whom I considered outstanding.

There was Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, the anthropologist, with his astonishing knowledge of 'Gandhiana'. Madame Sophia Wadia (who gave the *Jal Azad* delegates such welcome support in their attempt to stop the execution of Godse and his accomplice) was among the delegates – a very fine woman, though I am not sure that I am right to include her among the Indians, as I believe she is French by birth. One could mention many others, whose

names are little known, even in India, especially those who have dug themselves into the village life of the country, fostering co-operation and rural reconstruction, running *Harijan* colonies or Basic Schools. These little known workers, as I had already realised, were of all people the most important. The conference quickly responded to what was told of such work, many delegates having seen some of the rural centres, as I had done.

Among those listed as Indian delegates who were Indians only by adoption I was very happy to meet Dick Keithahn once more – the American missionary who had been turned out of India for giving me bed and board. Back once more, he was helping in the work of an *ashram*, down south, and had become a great enthusiast for 'Basic'. (The reader who is impatient had better read my last chapter at this point. As for me, I have my own way of telling a story and I shall explain 'Basic' when I think it is time to do so.) Many of the other delegates, apart from my companions on the *Jal Azad*, turned out to be people I had met before. What was important was the place in which we were meeting. Inevitably the friction between India and Pakistan loomed much larger on the programme than it would have done in any such conference, had it been held in Europe or America. Inevitably Gandhi 'presided' at our sessions – or rather, one had that feeling when the discussions were at their best. He was frequently quoted – too often in fact, and sometimes a little slavishly (in spite of Kripalani's warning.) But it was one of the *Gandhi-wallahs* who himself drew attention to the defects of discipleship, reminding us of Renan's saying – something to the effect that when Fate could not destroy a great man it sent him disciples in revenge.

Politically speaking India has rejected Gandhi in circumstances similar to those in which Britain rejected Churchill, but for precisely the opposite reasons. Each of these men was given the leadership in a struggle. Churchill led a military struggle, and was rejected at the end of it because many British people who had accepted him as a war leader did not consider a war leader the best person to lead the nation in time of peace. Gandhi led a non-violent struggle for independence; and when it was won his ideas were rejected because those who had accepted a pacifist and his methods in trying to win freedom were unable to believe that the same methods could preserve that freedom, once it was achieved. After the war we should really have asked for Gandhi (if we wanted the logical opposite of Churchill) and in granting independence to India we should have

offered Winston to the Indians, as they evidently wanted that sort of thing. Gandhi's 'disciples' in India today can be roughly divided into those who would agree with this analysis, and those who would hotly dispute it. Generally speaking – so it seemed to me – those who recognised that Gandhi had been politically rejected were doing the best work. The others pursued what Chesterton called the wrong kind of idealism – idealising the real instead of realising the ideal. Both types were represented at Santiniketan, and the difference seemed to me to be very marked.

But there were some whom I never quite fathomed, for lack of opportunity. One was a pandit on the staff of Santiniketan. He gave an address at the *mandir* shortly before we left, and I never had an opportunity to ask him exactly what he intended in a strange little story which he told. It concerned a Sepoy, at the time of the Mutiny – which is due for a centenary in seven years' time, now I come to think of it. (And, pacifism or no pacifism, who can blame Indians if they celebrate the First War of Independence in a big way?[1]). This Indian soldier in the story killed a *sadhu* under some misapprehension – just ran him through like that. As the holy man died he smiled and said: 'O, my Lord, have you appeared to me today in this form?' (The word used was *darshana*, which 'appearance' renders somewhat weakly). Our pandit had been struck by the resemblance between this – even the actual words (*Ha mera Ram*) – and the last words of Gandhi. But I was astonished when he went on to say that he had, in his youth, met 'an old religious man' who was none other than the murderer. 'Who knows,' he concluded, 'if the martyrdom of Gandhi will not turn out to be such a challenge to the world and bring about a similar conversion?' But surely, one wanted to add, the whole point of this story was that the murderer himself lived to repent. . . . Was that what the pandit intended to hint, or had he overlooked this most obvious point?

I was asked to do a good deal of broadcasting during my short stay in India and somehow crammed three recordings into one day during the week at Santiniketan. It was all good publicity for the Conference. The strain of that week was even further increased by the ubiquitous autograph hunters. During meetings of our Publicity

[1] It is astonishing, in view of the evidence of contemporary British writers (such as the diary of Sir William Russell and General Perronet Thompson's *Audi Alteram Partem*) that the popular, one sided version of this struggle is still that which is commonly taught in British schools. It is a version which finds no support even in such standard British works as Kaye and Malleson's *History of the Mutiny*.

Committee, which sat in the open for want of any other central place to meet, we had to ward off these fiends (mostly children, which made it harder) like flies or mosquitoes. To weaken and yield to one child was to attract the whole swarm around you, and we were always pressed for time. Horace, Vera Brittain and several others were showing signs of strain, as I know I must have been; and it was a relief to be at last in the train to Calcutta, though Vera and I spent the whole journey working on a final report. As we were all to meet again so soon the departure from Santiniketan was an easy one. For myself I felt that the place had changed. I had not felt about it, as a place, in the way that I had felt in 1930. Sabarmati without Bapu had still retained something essential; but Santiniketan without Gurudev (Tagore) seemed very different. Perhaps I was unfortunate in having had no time to 'cultivate' anybody apart from people attending the conference.

But two memories are still outstanding. One is of the superb ballet which we saw – *Chitraganda*. In 1930 I had been impressed by a ballet rehearsal at Santiniketan, with Tagore himself producing. But as it had not been possible for me to stay for the first performance I was glad, at last, to have an opportunity of seeing the real thing. Politics had interrupted me on that first occasion; but now Gandhi's promise of dancing after *Swaraj* was to be fulfilled. The ballet *Chitraganda* was adapted, I believe, from a play by Tagore, itself based upon one of the old Hindu legends in the *Mahabharata*. All the dancers were students, except for the man who took the part of Arjuna. His was indeed a brilliant performance; though I thought at first that it was either faulty judgment or bad memory which made me compare him favourably with the leading Indian professionals whom I had seen. Afterwards I was told that 'Arjuna' was the dancing master, a man much noted in his profession, and that my high opinion of his technique was shared by people better able to judge. Indian dancing is peculiarly intoxicating. I wonder if I was the only person who went to bed that night feeling slightly drunk.

Very different was the other memory. A small house had recently been built to serve as a memorial to Charles Andrews, the greatest of Gandhi's English friends, who had also been the closest English friend of Tagore. It is not possible here even to sketch the life of Andrews, whose name ought to be known as well in England as it is in India, though quite certainly it is not. From South Africa to Fiji, from Kenya to the most remote parts of India, he was the

champion of human rights. It was a commonplace among those who knew him that his face reminded them of certain pictures of Christ – a smiling Christ. India knew him as *Deenabandhu*, the Friend of the Poor.

The modest memorial at Santiniketan was to serve as a centre of better relations between East and West – a cause which Charlie Andrews had served all his life by the simple expedient of striving, as a European and a Christian, to serve the most downtrodden people in Asia and Africa. The memorial was formally opened during our week at Santiniketan. The appropriate Sanskrit *Mantras* were chanted. There were a few speeches – one (especially moving) by my friend Agatha Harrison, who for years had followed where Andrews led the way, and is among the most respected of India's English friends today. But they sang one English hymn, and that is what I most clearly remember. It was chosen because it had been a link between *Deenabandhu* Andrews and Bapu. It had history. And it linked both men with the Prince of Glory.

My mind inevitably recalled something which will never quite lose its freshness – the occasion, two years earlier, when some of us had met for a memorial meeting to Gandhi. The usual things had been said about his work and his spirit living on. They had not meant much to me. I only knew that I had lost a friend and that the world had lost a leader. It was that same hymn which had suddenly changed everything, and I couldn't possibly explain why. The emotion with which I had been struggling was instantly transformed – it was no longer grief that tried to choke me. It was joy, the kind of joy that hurts, as though one was not big enough for it.

As we sat outside the *Deenabandhu Bhavan* in the setting sun I remembered all this, and in some measure I did more than remember. But there is no formula for inspiration; and I did not expect that I should quite recapture it. It seemed sufficient just to remember what had happened. There is a strange thing about a certain type of ecstasy, that it brings peace; and even to remember it is to know that peace again.

CHAPTER TEN

Do you together walk, together hold converse, together come to a common mind,
Even as they who walked before us, finding knowledge together, worshipped as one.

THE RIGVEDA

THE DAY I arrived in Calcutta Professor A. G. Stock of Dacca University also arrived there on her way back from New Zealand. 'Dinah' Stock and I had worked together since 1930 in the W.E.A. and in various anti-imperialist activities; we had even collaborated once in an anthology of prison literature. As it was now clear that I should not have time to visit Pakistan I was very glad indeed – apart from the personal pleasure of meeting an old friend and colleague – to have such an opportunity of learning something about events in East Bengal.

Dinah's experiences in Pakistan had certainly been interesting. She had been in Dacca at the time of Gandhi's assassination. His two last fasts – at Calcutta and then at Delhi – undertaken as protests against inter-communal violence, had convinced most Moslems of his sincerity, in spite of all the propaganda directed against him. At Dacca the reaction to his death, as my friend had seen it, was one of 'sheer personal grief', after which 'they began to feel the ominousness of it and ask each other what would happen.' One of Dinah's Moslem friends said that what he had experienced in Calcutta was 'enough to cure a man of cynicism for ever'. He and thousands of others owed their lives to Gandhiji – they knew it and knew that it was in the nature of a miracle. They also realised that Gandhi had paid with his own life for their safety. After the murder Jinnah had, of course, added his frosty tribute to those which poured in from all over the world; and at that time I had been glad to hear that Moslem students resented such damning with faint praise: they had seen that it was small-minded, and felt ashamed.

Two Hindus who came from Pakistan to attend our conference had, however, made it clear that the new Moslem nationalism had already developed deep roots, and one of these men had spoken

warmly and generously of the 'Moslem Renaissance' which he believed to be implied in this development. Dinah Stock confirmed most of what I had heard, and said, in effect, what all the most intelligent observers had told me – that Pakistan was a fact, and that the problem was now to promote better relations between the two States and the two religions without raising questions which could only exacerbate existing tensions.

There were the usual meetings and receptions in Calcutta, but what interested me most was a visit to a village fifteen miles from the city where Dinah and I were invited as guests of a professor of Calcutta University and his enterprising wife. Our hosts were indeed remarkable people. They had started a school for 50 refugee children and about 400 from the surrounding villages, a courageous venture into which they were pouring all their own money and a very independable (also quite inadequate) grant from the government. We arrived late and sat on a verandah listening to the story while the sky darkened.

'Where are the school buildings?' I asked presently.

My hostess laughed. 'There aren't any.'

'But. . . . What do you do in the monsoons?'

'There is always this verandah.'

The verandah surrounded a large building, intended originally as a museum of Indian crafts to contain a great collection made by the late Gurusaday Dutt. Dutt had founded a movement for the revival of the indigenous culture of Bengal, but he had died before his plans relating to the museum had been completed. This had one fortunate aspect, for the empty building served to house the refugee children. A small village had grown up round this place, known as Bratacharigram; and although Dutt never completed his plans regarding the museum he did leave behind him a centre of village culture and a live movement.

In its insistence on the dignity of labour and the attempt to express this belief in rural reconstruction, the *Bratachari* movement is closely in line with the Gandhi centres, though it shows more interest in the old songs and dances than one could find, until recently, in the Gandhi *ashrams*. The movement is also in line with Gandhi's ideas in its equal emphasis on internationalism and regional patriotism. (It has often occurred to me that the modern nation-state is a dangerous sham because it is at the same time too big and too small – too big to be a real community and too small to express human brotherhood. The parish pump is a reality and so is humanity

in its widest sense – the nation-state is the enemy of both, crushing regional initiative and perpetually threatening world peace.)

Hindu-Moslem unity is another point on which the *Bratachari* movement lays great stress. Altogether this little cultural centre seemed very suitably chosen for an educational experiment, and that was what our friends the Roys were attempting. 'I suppose you started the school on account of the refugees,' I said to Mrs Roy, and she laughed again. 'The refugees,' she answered, 'were a means to do what I've been wanting to do all my life.' The village children were from 'backward' tribes and started at some disadvantage; but owing to the conditions attached to the precarious government grant all were being educated with one eye on matriculation. This was unfortunate, as examination standards make any full application of 'Basic' principles impossible. However, as we saw the next morning, the crafts played a big part in this school, and the curriculum included spinning, weaving, basket making, carpentry, metal work, gardening and farming. Professor and Mrs Roy reckoned the cost per head for the refugees (who were boarders) at Rs. 18 per head a month – about a shilling a day.

That night we ate in the communal kitchen. It was a long building, where we sat in rows on the mud floor. The place and everything about the meal reminded me of Sabarmati twenty years previously; and that greatly pleased me, as the common kitchen was one of the things I had missed in re-visiting the old *ashram*. This place took my mind back to those great days of fellowship – and why are meals together, I wonder, such an important ritual of friendship and *camaraderie?* Very vividly I recalled each detail – the servers passing up and down the lines, the sudden clang of a gong, the chant that ended '*Om, Santi, Santi, Santi.*' *Santi* means peace, which was, on the whole, more evident here at Bratacharigram than it had been at Santiniketan, its official 'Abode'. That is probably because peace is a by-product – something which just happens when you are looking for something else.

The *Bratachara* Society run camps at Bratacharigram, where adults take short courses in various things – principally in dancing and singing, I gathered. One of these courses was in progress at the time of our visit, and the campers ate with us. When we were introduced to them individually, after the meal, I was astonished to find that among them were prison warders who had been given special leave for this purpose. They came to learn folk-songs and

folk-dances to teach the prisoners, as apparently the authorities had discovered that dancing and singing in a jail made life more tolerable for everybody concerned, including the warders.

Late that night I was piloted through a maze of narrow paths to the mud hut where I was to sleep. Like so many places in Bengal, Bratacharigram is a little village Venice, and on my way to the hut I saw the gleam of water in all directions, my guide and I being often obliged to walk in single file along narrow causeways between ponds. In the morning I had a clearer view of all this. Everywhere I saw ponds and canals, groups of palms and flooded paddy fields. Although it was then light I still needed a guide to thread my way back to the museum, where we all breakfasted on the verandah.

I do not specially dislike Calcutta, as so many people do (including my wife) but I was very sorry to return to the city after this delightful interlude. My compensation was that I spent my last night there with Naresh Kumar, a young international tennis player with whom I had shared a cabin on the *Jal Azad*. Before I left for Allahabad I had the pleasure of seeing my host's excellent form in the Provincial tournaments.

Among the childish delights of any visit to India is that of collecting advertisements, and I make no apology for sharing with the reader a few extracts from one I found in Calcutta, in the programme of a youth organisation which invited me to a demonstration. Headed 'Revolution in Astrology and Astronomy', it proclaimed the Services of Jyotishsamrat Pandit Sri Ramesh Chandra Bhattacharyya, Jyotisharnab, M.R.A.S. (Lond.) who 'has won unique fame not only in India but throughout the world (*e.g.* in England, America, Africa, China, Japan, Malaya, etc.)'. The accomplishments of this genius cover the biggest range I have yet discovered, and make small beer of all our patent medicines and what-not. He can heal diseases 'which are the despair of doctors . . . can help people to win difficult law suits and ensure safety from dangers, prevent childlessness and free people of family unhappiness.' His achievements, I was impressed to learn, had won him 'unstinted praise and gratitude from all quarters including His Majesty George the Sixth . . .'

Should any of my readers desire the services of this pandit, I am happy to quote his terms for solving some of our common problems. He offers 'WONDERFUL TALISMANS (Guaranteed). In case of failure, money returned.' THE ROTHSCHILD TALISMAN

is first on the list. 'Its wearer earns immense wealth with little struggling and it fulfils the desires without fail. Lakshmi resides at his house and gives him son,[1] fame, vast wealth, long life, all-round prosperity in life. Price Rs. 7.10. Special for Speedy action Rs. 29.11. Super powerful with extraordinary effects Rs. 129.11.' No one, I am sure, would seriously dispute that the pandit has found a talisman for acquiring 'immense wealth with little struggling' and I certainly hope Lakshmi has given him a son to carry on the business. Other talismans offered for sale at the same graded prices for degrees of speed and potency include a useful gadget for doing other people down: 'To overcome enemies it is unique. The wearer gets promotion in services and succeeds in pleasing higher officials. In winning in civil or criminal suits it is unparalleled.' I am not clear what happens in a law suit if each party is armed with a talisman of the same grade – say, with a Super Powerful charm at Rs. 184.4. Probably the Judge has to declare a stalemate.

The students, of course, are not forgotten and can be sure of 'success in examination' for a mere nine rupees nine annas, though I should have thought it a better investment to buy a Rothschild Talisman – the common or garden variety at seven rupees ten annas – and have everything you want, which surely ought to include matriculation and even a B.A. It seems unfair to pay more for exam results than one shells out for immense wealth, fame, prosperity and a son thrown in – but perhaps this just shows how highly education is valued in Calcutta. What I really do not like is the odd number of annas tagged on to every price. Even if they do represent a fixed percentage of profit on the wholesale prices, I think they should be adjusted to the nearest round figure in rupees. The examination talisman, I notice, is the only one which is not offered in the third, or superlative, degree of potency. You can buy an ordinary B.A. or a Special, but not a Super Powerful.

The pandit was not a surprise – I felt I had met him before. Much more surprising was the number of streets, squares, etc., in Calcutta still bearing the names of past British rulers – not even the more colourful ones, but the duller proconsuls, mass-produced in our public-schools and universities. I had noticed this in Delhi – even the lady Minister of Health still lives in Willingdon Crescent – but in Calcutta I found such names even more common. If Indians re-

[1] In case this should be misunderstood I should perhaps explain that Lakshmi is the Hindu Goddess of Fortune.

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named such places after Shakespeare or Shelley one could take it as a charming compliment to Britain; but the retention of names designed to immortalise British rule and the starchy satraps who once propped it up was something which I found inexplicable.

The route which I next followed was roughly that of 1930, and offered some interesting comparisons. Hurrying back from Calcutta twenty years previously I had gone to Allahabad after my short visit to Santiniketan, and then into the Central Provinces. I had a pleasant memory of Allahabad, where I had stayed with an Anglo-Indian barrister whom I had met on the way out in '29 – a man exceptional for his thoughtful and liberal attitude, at a time when his community was not noted for liberal opinions. Cecil Desanges regretted the social exclusiveness of the Eurasians. (The name is for some reason discredited today, though it is much more accurate than 'Anglo-Indians', as other Europeans have been involved in these mixed marriages.) Far into the night, on the verandah of his house, Desanges had made me tell him of my travels, asking innumerable questions about Gandhi. And at the end of it he had said something which later consoled me when I thought how short had been my experience of India. 'I have lived all my life in this country,' he said, 'and I am near fifty. In a few months you have learnt more than I have about it.' I had looked up quickly to see if he was laughing at me, but there was still the same grave, kindly expression on his face. I tried hard to trace that man again in 1949, but could only discover that he had left Allahabad.

Having in 1930 just missed the *Kumbh-Mela* at this town – probably the biggest of the Hindu religious festivals, which takes place every twelve years – I did the next best thing in 1949 by rowing down to the *sangam*, the place where the *Mela* is celebrated, at the conflux of the Jamna with the Ganges. Even without a *Mela* I found the sight curious and quite unforgettable. On the bank were crowds of people, 'terrible as an army with banners'. And the banners were not lacking. For every part of India from which the pilgrims come in their millions there is a *panda* who keeps the score, marking up their attendances and ablutions at this holy spot. Each *panda* has his own pennon, by which he can be found; and as this scoring is a family business the records kept by some of these Recording Angels are said to be of very great age. As I rowed down stream with my host other boats were converging upon the same spot, and soon we were right in the most sacred part of the sacred river. Here the

devout were washing themselves and their clothes, spitting hard and blowing through their noses in the approved fashion. After which those who were thrifty of grace would fill bottles or *lotas* with the holy liquor to take home with them.[1]

One pleasant memory of this second visit to Allahabad is of drives round the town in an *ekkha*, a horse-drawn vehicle similar to the Irish side-car, where the seats face right and left. The *ekkha-wallah* had a magnificent horse, in excellent condition, and drove like a charioteer, using an enormous motor horn (which he held under his arm) to clear the way. He showed much approval of my Gandhi cap and called me 'Panditji' (i.e. Pandit Nehru), which was very flattering. In spite of language difficulties we made friends over cigarettes, which I gave him, and sweets which he bought from a street hawker – accepted by me with some alarm but many signs of pleasure. The Gandhi cap on a European head will still arouse interest and promote friendship, but among Indians its use is more dubious. Once it took courage to wear it.[2] Today it is often, as a friend said to me, 'the badge of a rascal' – i.e., of somebody wishing, for ignoble motives, to curry favour with those now in authority.

From Allahabad onwards I seem to have walked into a crime wave. Dacoits had been busy around Allahabad and *chaukidars* were in demand to guard places at night. The stillness was punctuated by the long, wailing cries whereby each *chaukidar* made sure that all was well at the next post. The brigand chief was, so I was assured, well known in the neighbourhood – you could see the *badmash* any day at a neighbouring village, making up arrears of sleep on a *charpoy* after his nocturnal exertions.[3] Meanwhile news reached me

[1] I am informed that at a *Kumbh-Mela* as many as 3,000,000 will come to this place for such purposes. My friend Francis Evelyn, who was present in 1906, found it 'a dreadful spectacle', and I think I should have felt similarly had I ever seen a *Mela*. It was at this spot that some of Gandhi's ashes were consigned to the Ganges – the rest being disposed of similarly in other parts of the country after a singularly inappropriate military funeral.

[2] At Sholapur, for example, wearers of Gandhi caps were assaulted by soldiers and police in 1930 as a matter of deliberate policy, though the Labour Government at first tried to deny this. In general the cap was an invitation to be penalised and possibly assaulted by the police (or shot by accident, if shooting started anywhere).

[3] Behind this crime wave there was considerable social disturbance. On November 25th, 1949, fifteen to twenty thousand *kisans* (peasants) had demonstrated against the United Provinces Government at Lucknow – headed by the Vice-Chancellor of Lucknow University. The U.P. Government was – to its credit – attempting to end landlordism, but its methods were unfortunate. It was trying to collect several years' rent in one year from these *kisans* in order to buy out the big landed proprietors whose tenants they had been.

that a murder had been committed in the compound where my next host lived – near Hoshangabad, in the Central Provinces – and I arrived there to find everyone except my host and hostess in a state of alarm. The police, to reassure all concerned, had given out that the murderer was probably somebody living in that compound (a small Mission Centre) and I felt rather like Lord Peter Wimsey on arriving at such a place. But I found no clues and did no brilliant deductions, so the similarity was not over-worked.

My hosts at Allahabad were Quakers, and until I reached Sevagram all the people with whom I stayed were either members of the Society of Friends or people connected with Friends' Missions. The change during twenty years in missions and missionaries was one of the really encouraging things which I often noticed. On my first visit I had met a few missionaries who impressed me favourably – though one of these (Verrier Elwin) later gave up that work and became highly critical of missionary activities. But on the whole my own impressions in 1929 and 1930 were very adverse. The few missionaries who came to Sabarmati – probably the more liberal minded – had struck me, with one or two exceptions, as meddlesome busy-bodies.

In the U.P. I had met Dr Stanley Jones, but I had also met an American missionary lady who looked and talked like a caricature. Hearing I had come from Lahore she had said vaguely 'That is where all these nationalist people have been meeting, isn't it?' From her later conversation, as I noted at the time, 'it was clear that she thought they met to discuss the possibility of bombing her. Anyway, now I understand why Bapu always tells the missionaries to go and live in a hut among the peasants.' The luxury in which so many of these professing Christians lived, in the midst of India's poverty, was no less depressing than their support of the British Raj. My own impressions in this matter were abundantly confirmed by others, including the more enlightened missionaries. It was, I remember, from the Brothers at Poona that I heard some of the worst accounts, for the unsatisfactory attitude of missionaries with regard to freedom and social justice weighed very heavily on the minds of the few who really cared about these things.[1]

[1] The comments of non-Christians were sometimes illuminating. Two Parsee critics of Gandhi told me in 1930 how they admired the Christians. 'They are the most violent people,' I was told, 'and therefore the most successful. You have only to look at the map . . .'

Without going into any details, involving personal criticisms, I should make it clear that I was even extremely unhappy about what I saw of the Quaker mission work, in 1930. One man at least had a deep love for the people of India and a rare understanding of them. But there was something utterly unhealthy about the whole relationship between the missionaries and the converts, who were spiritually spoon-fed and economically dependent. An atmosphere had been created in which free and frank discussion, such as I had been used to enjoy with my Indian friends, was quite impossible. Politically and in most other ways the converts whom I met then in the Central Provinces were very backward by comparison with any other group of Indians I had known. Worse still, they seemed to me timid and even sycophantic – I felt that one might as well have expected an eighteenth century farm-labourer to speak his mind frankly to the squire as hope for any real expression of what these people thought and felt in the presence of the missionaries or other Europeans.

It was a great relief, in 1949, to discover how much things had changed. Indeed, it was more than a relief, for I was very happy with my various hosts, all of them working for the Friends' Service Council. There were plenty of problems still unsolved – not least the problems created by generations of patriarchal mission work. When Indians become 'Christians' for all the wrong reasons and are brought up in a state of spiritual and economic dependence upon a Big White Chief you cannot undo all the harm in a few years. Although Quakerism is probably the most democratic expression of Christianity, no attempt had originally been made to cultivate that independent spirit which is so characteristic of the Society of Friends. The new missionaries with their new approach had, in fact, to deal with a situation in which a body of nominal Indian Quakers still insisted on regarding them as equivalent to priests or bishops – exactly what they were determined not to be. Indeed, the most devastating comment on this was made by an Indian Christian who said to a friend of mine, 'We are sheep without a shepherd.' Generations of mission work, so far from lifting these people up, had destroyed all independence of character. Some argued from this that the old 'pastoral' methods must be introduced again. The new Quaker missionaries, with more logic, reasoned that this would only perpetuate a deplorable state of affairs by the very methods which had created it.

Even the word 'missionary' is, with very good reason, not a popular one with the new type of Christian worker. The name connotes, in Indian minds, too many unpleasant political associations and an attitude to other religions which has been justly resented. I myself remember how I once had to listen for hours to an almost continuous diatribe against everything Indian and particularly everything Hindu – the speakers being two perfectly sincere Quaker missionaries. But those Hindus and Moslems who hate one another to the point of murder are also perfectly sincere. What is needed most of all, in India today, is not further bigotry and a new Christian 'communalism', but the spirit of reconciliation. It is to the great credit of the Quakers now working in India that most of them have made this their first concern.

The old houses of the missionaries still show traces of the past. One notices such things as the disused *punkah*, a fan once worked by a wretched *punkah wallah*, who would sit for hours at a time serving no purpose but that of preserving a missionary *sahib* or his *mem-sahib* from the heat. One of these big houses, formerly occupied by Quaker missionaries – a real *bara sahib's* house – had been turned into a Basic Education Training Centre. That was news which indeed delighted me.

Only once did I hear what seemed to me an echo of the unhealthy relationship which had formerly existed between the missionaries and the Indian Christians. That was when a man, unwilling to act in conflict with instructions given to him by one of the missionaries, explained that 'the *sahib* would be angry'. But an ex-missionary of the old school assured me, with apparent satisfaction, that an Indian with whom he had recently been talking would have liked the British back. There are, I imagine, quite a number of British people still living in India who cultivate the illusion that this is a common view; though (if they only thought for a moment) there is a very simple test. If any considerable number of Indians are really of that opinion, one might reasonably expect at least the formation of a small anti-independence party with a simple and attractive programme: 'Back to Foreign Rule and Down with Self-Government.' So far no such party has even made an appearance.

Itarsi is roughly the centre of Quaker work in the C.P. The future of some of this work was still uncertain, but at the time of my visit in December 1949 it included a hospital, an agricultural colony, a multi-purposes co-operative store, a Boys' School, a Girls'

Boarding School and a co-educational 'Basic School'. This last is at Rasulia, near Hoshangabad, which I consider the loveliest of all the Indian towns that I have seen. My chief regret was that I had no time to revisit Hoshangabad. I remembered it vividly as I had seen it from a small boat on the river Narbada, looking up a succession of terraces at white temples glittering in the sunlight. I also remembered it for the only jungle fire I ever saw, a thin stream of flame that swept up the Vindhya Mountains, beyond the river, at dusk. In 1949 I had time only for a very rapid tour of the rather scattered centres of Quaker work, but I am glad I made it. It gave me a new conception of what the word 'mission' could imply – and God knows there's need for *some* sense of 'mission' in a world where millions live in slavery, millions on the verge of starvation and the rest drift placidly on towards an atomic war . . .

Freedom, Security, Justice and Peace might all be achieved if enough people made a 'mission' of rural reconstruction, democratic de-centralisation of industries and education based upon real values instead of social fictions. It would be a mission of Life against Death and Damnation.

I reached Sevagram late on Christmas Eve, and I arrived – in company with several other conference delegates – in a Black Maria. It was not because we had been misbehaving, but because the local authorities had kindly offered to provide transport facilities, and this was the fulfilment of their promise.[1] It showed great delicacy and tact, as most of our crowd had, I should think, been in jail at some time or other. It was too late to see Sevagram that night, and in fact I never really looked over the grounds and buildings till a week later, press work keeping me busy all day and late each night in my tent. Two sparrows nested at the top of a tent pole, right over my bed. We cleared the nest away once, in their own interests, feeling that so temporary a structure as a tent was no place to be hatching eggs. But the sparrows immediately rebuilt – they had taken a fancy to the place. I had to sleep under a mosquito net although there were no mosquitoes, and by day the birds nattered and pecked at their reflections in my shaving mirror.

Twenty years before I had spent Christmas under canvas – at Lahore. In all the turmoil of our arrival Gandhiji had somehow

[1] The authorities were, as usual, very good to us. For our benefit a temporary post office was set up at Sevagram and the Postmaster General of the Province arrived one day to see that we were receiving proper attention.

managed, between committees and personal discussions with other Congress leaders, to remember the young Englishman. Would he not be feeling a bit lost and even homesick, seeing it was Christmas? Anyway, the old man had made sure, sending a *khaddar* pillow case full of fruit to my tent. He had apologised afterwards for the fact that he possessed no stockings, so this was the best he could manage. He had also insisted that Mirabehn and I should sing a carol at the morning prayers. It all came back to me, and I wondered what sort of a show we should make of Christmas this time. Should we just carry on with the conference, regardless? I was feeling somewhat depressed as I opened a huge pile of letters waiting for me and read them by the light of the inevitable hurricane lamp, for on top there had been a cable from England, announcing the death of an old friend and colleague.[1]

However, it was soon clear at least that the *ashram* people were not going to let us forget that it was Christmas. Like Gandhi, they wanted their Western friends to feel at home – and, apart from that, inter-religious unity is something which normally finds ample expression at Sevagram. On Christmas evening they produced a Nativity Play – or (strictly speaking) a mime, which was a much better idea, as it presented no language problems. The three shepherds were played by Buddhists from the mountains of Thibet, who had recently joined the community. Nearly all the other players were Hindus, St Joseph being the only Christian, and a mere Quaker, at that. The audience sat on mats in the farmyard, the 'stage' being in and about the cow sheds where the Hindu cows co-operated with an occasional *moo*. So the whole setting was highly realistic. A cow calved just as the performance was about to begin. Some of us had formed a choir, which (after one rehearsal) managed appropriate carols under the producer's instructions. When I write about it I am afraid I give an impression of the worst kind of dumb charades; but it was not like that at all. It was deeply moving. At the end somebody began to sing *Adeste Fideles* and others immediately joined in, while the scratch choir and the audience closed slowly round the manger. All that was quite unprogrammed and spontaneous.

In the week that followed we realised, much more than at Santiniketan (where so many of us had met as strangers) a sense of unity which nevertheless defied all efforts to express it adequately in

[1] Runham Brown, a good friend of India, mentioned in Chapter VI.

any formula. It was something at least akin to that harmony which is expressed at the head of this chapter, in the words of the *Rigveda* – words which had been chanted on Christmas morning. And there were other words which had been read, appropriate to the occasion, which for at least one delegate had a hidden secondary significance: *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder.* To me this was the key to all our problems – Indian or universal. The children of today being the citizens of tomorrow, *the government will be upon their shoulders.*[1] The new experiments in education, which had been interesting my mind increasingly during this Indian visit, were now a special object of investigation by a Commission of which I was a member.

I propose here, however, to give only a few impressions of that week. Like the 'siege perilous' at Arthur's Round Table, the place of Gandhi on the prayer ground was left empty. (All the same, I did not regret my acceptance of the invitation to occupy his place at Sabarmati; and it was certainly not because I had fancied the rôle of Galahad.) Then I recall the morning when some of us went harvesting millet with the students (before the first session) and for a short while we sensed the feeling of the place – something which it was hard to do whilst our own invasion was so disrupting its normal life. I call to mind the attentive student volunteers, like those of Santiniketan. They rose before dawn to light fires, so that they could bring hot water for the camp 'bathrooms'. At night the crescent moon reclined on her back – a position which always looks so odd to visitors from the North. Drenched with unslept sleep – for once more I managed a bare four and a half hours a night – I envied her supine indolence.

One morning, by invitation of the villagers, we visited Sevagram village. This was at 7.30 a.m., to fit in with their work and our sessions. They had improvised an archway, decorated with mango leaves, under which we passed. The women gave us flowers and we sat down under a tamarind tree, opposite rows of healthy and high-spirited children. This village had been the object of some intensive work by Gandhi's followers, and one could see the results even in the trim appearance of the tiled huts, with their neat bamboo screens, shading cool verandahs. The place had a feeling of well-being. They chanted words which, twenty years before, had seldom been heard outside the Gandhi *ashrams;* but Gandhi had made them

[1] A thought which I owe to George Sampson in *English for the English* (1921).

popular throughout the country, and I had heard them often on the *Jal Azad* and all over India since my arrival:

Rhagupati Raghava Raja Ram,
Patita Pawana Sita-Ram . . .

What is especially interesting in this invocation of Ram and Sita, apart from the subtle variations in the melody, is the introduction of a verse – since my first visit to India – in which the Moslem 'Allah' is identified with 'Ishwar', a name of the Supreme God in the Hindu religion.

The villagers also sang two songs of Tukaram, many of whose beautiful verses Gandhi translated into English while he was in Yeravda Prison. A representative of the village, in a brief speech of welcome, mentioned very modestly what had so far been done under 'Bapu's constructive programme'. They had a maternity and child welfare centre, a 'pre-basic' school (i.e. roughly for children of *kindergarten* age), a grain bank, a multi-purposes co-operative store, and a small centre for the production of palm *gur* (a form of unrefined palm sugar.) They had started a scheme for making the village self-sufficient in cloth, they had a village *panchayat* and court, they were trying to improve the breeding of cattle and were making compost for their crops. They had even formed a housing society to build better houses. Most of these activities I was able to inspect with approval after the conference was over. The grain bank specially interested me, as it cut across the pernicious money lending system and – indeed – cut out money altogether in its own transactions. The village spokesman, as translated by one of our friends, apologised nevertheless that so little had been done 'because of our ignorance' and referred to the many problems which remained to be tackled.

We were allowed to do rather more for ourselves at Sevagram than we had done at Santiniketan, but too often the vigilant student volunteers would anticipate one's slightest needs. If you expostulated the reply was almost invariably the same: 'It is my duty' – usually accompanied by what I have learnt to call the 'double swerve' (a curious motion of the head). Occasionally the reply would be: 'It is nothing.' In either case the expression would be equally solemn. One has to know Indian ways to understand this. In reality it is the equivalent of 'You're welcome' or 'Don't mention it'; and the absence of a smile is quite unimportant. Too easily the European interprets the rather wooden phrase and the lack of

expression in his own terms, making them mean 'It's a bore, but I am doing what is expected of me, however reluctantly.'

Before noon each day it was really hot, but the nights and mornings were cold and I admired the heroism of Richard Gregg, who went about at all hours in a *dhoti* of white *khaddar*. Most of the Westerners, myself included, followed the example of Asher.[1] (Incidentally, I wonder whether a more ungainly garment than a dhoti has ever been devised – especially as seen from the rear when it is even a little crumpled – and only a very conservative people could so long have used anything so wasteful of cloth, considering the poverty of the country. I wore one myself often enough twenty years ago, but certainly not for comfort or elegance – merely as a token of my political sympathies. The only merit that I can find in it is that of all garments it is surely the furthest from anything military. But this fact did not prevent Rajaghopolachariar, as Governor General, from reviewing troops in a *dhoti* – a sight which I should rather have enjoyed for its Thermopylist incongruity.)

The Commission to which I gave a good deal of my time had as its chairman Wilfred Wellock. Since the days when he had taken up Dick Keithahn's case in Parliament he had completely separated himself from politics. His interest had shifted to organic methods of farming and the de-centralisation of industry. Wellock, Gregg and others from the West felt, as I did, that in these rural centres founded by Gandhi we had a working example of a new method of social revolution through small groups. The idea gradually seemed to grip the conference as a whole, and a proposal was even put forward that an international centre should be founded in India as a training ground in *ashram* methods. I am sure this would have been a mistake; and it was immediately opposed by one of the most devoted and (at least among the European visitors) the most respected of the *ashram* workers, Asha Devi. She seldom spoke, but when she did there was always a deeper and closer attention among the delegates – a fact which was most noticeable if there had been a somewhat clamorous debate. The voices of Indian women generally sound shrill to a European ear. Asha Devi's voice is as gentle and quiet as her face. The whole point of an *ashram*, she explained, was that it was indigenous to a locality – any such centre under international control must lose that indigenous character.

The Negro Principal of Howard University came in at that point

[1] According to Judges V. 17 he 'abode in his breaches'.

with one of his memorable phrases. Mordecai Johnson had come to be accepted as the most formidable personality among the delegates. Unless my notes are inaccurate he said that he 'respected the fear of Asha Devi that the tender plant growing here would be ruined by an international blunderbus and by putting too many babies at its tender breast.' It is unfortunately impossible to convey the personality of that man to the reader – he always seemed to me somehow larger than life-size. His phrases became current coin among us. 'Innocuous positionalism' meant passing pious resolutions without action. Of a worthy, but somewhat wordy, document he suggested that it needed 'the word water squeezed out of it'. Once I heard his deep voice booming that 'this place is about saturated with phrases spilt by me and I'm not spilling any more.' Fortunately for us all he never kept to that threat.

On New Year's Eve, the last day of our conference, Jawaharlal Nehru visited Sevagram to address the delegates. Twice I had missed him and I was glad that, now we were to meet, it was to be in surroundings something like those in which I had known him in the past. I had met him once or twice in London, but my last vivid memories of 'Panditji' were connected with Sabarmati. He had been there before I took Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy; and that very day, before we both took the night train from Ahmedabad, we had attended a Hindu wedding at the *ashram*. It was quite a 'society' wedding, so to speak, for some many of the Congress notables were at Sabarmati just then to consult with Bapu, and they all came – Sardar Patel, Jammalal Bajaj and the rest. The future Prime Minister, sitting next to me, had given me a running commentary while the pandit in charge of the business rattled off Sanskrit at an amazing speed and the congregation chatted happily without paying any apparent attention. I remembered Jawaharlal telling me that this pandit was obviously an amateur at the job – as appeared from the fact that he periodically became lost among his vast pile of books and papers.

Later we had left together on the same mail train, parting company at a junction, where I had insisted on carrying his bag, 'because', I explained, 'you will be famous one day and I shall be able to say that I once carried your bag'. Such were my memories of Panditji – all pleasant and personal, beginning from our first meeting at Wardha and the talks in Dr Mahmoud's tent at Lahore. After Gandhi left Sabarmati on his march to the coast I had seen more of

Jawaharlal, in his political capacity. Already, after the Lahore Congress, I had written 'It is not quite fair to call him the Cavour of the movement, but that is the nearest historical parallel.' At a Congress Working Committee, which I had attended by invitation shortly before Panditji's arrest, I had heard him address his comrades in an almost dictatorial mood – though nobody, in the circumstances could have blamed him. They had been discussing his powers as Congress President in emergency situations, and he had listened to several long-winded speakers before he intervened curtly from the chair. 'In an emergency,' he said, 'the President will act as he thinks fit, and you may censure him afterwards if you like.' They could pass, he told them, whatever resolutions they pleased. His firmness on this occasion had certainly snuffed out a discussion which was peculiarly silly in such a critical situation.

And now he was arriving as Prime Minister, heralded by armed guards who prowled around the camp. I turned suddenly from a conversation to find him at my side. He looked even more distinguished than he had when I first met him and far more so than any other living statesman. There was something in his face which no photograph has ever conveyed – a curious blend of humour and sadness, kindness and irony, especially noticeable when he smiled. We spoke briefly, only for a few minutes, for many were waiting to meet him. It was not until I lunched with him later, at New Delhi, that I was really able to talk with Panditji, and even then conversation was somewhat limited.

Politicians always make me nervous – the more so if I like them personally. I feel that we look at the world from different angles, and the gulf widens when they become administrators, moving in an authoritarian world that is foreign to my anarchistic temperament. On that later occasion, at Delhi, Jawaharlal fortunately talked mainly of India's refugees, for whom he feels deeply. A maharajah who had been at Harrow with Nehru interrupted this with reminiscences of their school days to which his host listened patiently. It was a strange lunch, altogether, in the Prime Minister's garden, where I sat next to a not very talkative English lady. The only words I remember her to have uttered were occasioned by the sudden appearance of a pheasant, when she turned to her husband and said: '*Darling*, what a *pity* you haven't got your *gun!*' That was the last time I saw Jawaharlal, and as we parted I fumbled for the right phrase, muttering something about the pleasure of seeing him

'in all his glory'. He half turned away and said, as though he had been thinking aloud: 'I'm afraid it is faded.'

This is all anticipating – but chronology is a bore. At Sevagram Nehru addressed the delegates and made an excellent impression. He always does. But the real speech of the conference was not that of our distinguished visitor nor was it one of the many brilliant addresses by Mordecai Johnson. It was the last speech on the last evening, made by a gaunt, haggard man who had been with us for a week and said very little. The last word lay with Michael Scott, and it was the cry from Africa which I shall retain as the thing which most deeply impressed me. Here, indeed, was work that needed the inspiration and the leadership of a Gandhi. The prayer of an African chieftain has yet to be answered through human hearts and hands: 'Oh, Lord, help us who roam about. Help us who have been placed in Africa and have no home of our own. Give us back a dwelling place.'

* * *

The rest of my experiences before I left for England can be told briefly enough. I remained one day at Sevagram, in order to see the place – revisiting the village, going all over the Sevagram farm and inspecting the training centre of the All India Spinners Association. That day Sevagram resumed its normal life, which it was pleasant to share. Our invasion, however, had at least dealt drastically with a local glut of bananas, of which 100 guests had consumed 3,000 in a week.

At last I visited Bapu's hut, and saw the small, bare room where he had lived and worked in his last years, There were his few possessions – a staff, a pair of wooden sandals, his spectacles and not much else. Though it lacked those personal associations which, in my case, are largely confined to Sabarmati, this place evoked more than I had felt at Gandhi's birthplace or on the spot where he died. As I stood there in silence the inevitable autograph hunter entered and presented his book for a signature. . . . I stared at him.

After a twenty-four hour journey I arrived in Delhi, where most of the delegates had gone the previous day. Here we were all invited to numerous receptions, including one at Government House, as guests of the Governor General. This was real comic opera. Armed guards lined the drive, the stairway and the hall in which the reception was held. The entertainment ended with some films, including

one of Gandhi's life, with a somewhat lush commentary that emphasised the virtue of non-violence. India is a little bewildering at times. The Governor General (whose cumbrous name is commonly shortened to 'Rajaji' or 'C.R.') remembered me from the old days and spoke kindly.[1] He had taken no offence at our attempted interference with regard to the executions. As a matter of fact, it was part of the general Indian paradox that he had treated Gregg with such exceptional courtesy when he went on that hopeless mission. There are many countries where the ideas about capital punishment are more enlightened; but there is no country in the world where 'ordinary' people like Richard Gregg or myself, without official status or the advantage of fame, can hope for so much courtesy from those in power.

Nehru was at that reception, also Devadas Gandhi, whom I did not see again, as he left for London. He seemed anxious as to whether I had any 'resentment' against his father-in-law, and I was able to assure him truthfully that I had none. We were grateful for all the kindness we had received from the government. Criticism is a different matter, and I did not wish to discuss the many half-formed impressions in my mind. It is hard enough even now to get everything into true perspective.

At Delhi I stayed at first with the Principal of the Hindu College, N. V. Thadani, a man of independent character, who criticised everything from the Government to Indian educational standards with knowledge and complete objectivity. But I soon found that my address in Delhi was too well known and too accessible. After some days I moved outside the city, as the guest of a young Scottish Sergeant-Major whom I had met on the *Jal Azad*. He was on loan, as a radio technician, to the Army H.Q. Signals Regiment. In the 'Wireless Village' I really found some peace at last – among the soldiers. Few people knew where I was and it also amused me to think that I was protected from intruders by a sentry. Even internationalism thrived in this place, for Angus, my host, used to chat on the radio with amateur radio enthusiasts all over the world. Helsinki, Rangoon, Saudi Arabia, Melbourne and Lhassa were all among his regular contacts. He had, so he told me, chatted with the *Kon-Tiki* adventurers when they were crossing the Pacific on their

[1] In my 1929–30 journals I find that I said of Rajaji: 'He is a simple man and lacks "distinction", but may succeed in spite of it, just as Bapu did.' Today I should certainly withdraw the charge of simplicity.

raft. So here, too, *Pantagruelion* seemed to have been at work. Among the people whom I visited when Angus drove me into the city was another friend whom I had acquired on the *Jal Azad* – the Czech Ambassador. I was astonished to find how much he had learnt about India in so short a time; and that knowledge was not merely superficial. He was too good a man for the job; and the news of his resignation a year later did not surprise me.

With Michael Scott and a few others I next visited Mirabehn, staying three days at Rishikesh, a night's journey from Delhi, on the south bank of the Ganges. Rishikesh is perhaps the most ancient centre of Hindu scholarship, and still a great resort of *sadhus*. Here Mirabehn – herself now wearing the saffron garment of a *sadhu* – had made her *ashram*, a centre from which she supervised a big government cattle-centre, known as *Pashulok*. From Mirabehn's hut one looked across the clear, shallow rapids to the foothills of the Himalaya, rising from the further bank to about five thousand feet, though at such close distance they looked very much higher. Some of us climbed that first range, and from its summit saw the vaster mountains that lay behind it, the snow being just visible on the furthest peaks in sight. It was astonishing to find a small village near the top of this range, the steep slopes being cultivated by means of terracing and contour ploughing. We had lost our way in the jungle of the lower slopes on our way up, and had to hurry back to avoid being overtaken by darkness. There were tigers and other wild beasts in these parts, we were told, though we did not see any. But Mirabehn said that leopard footprints were frequently to be seen on the path between her hut and the one where most of us were sleeping.

The cold here, from dusk till about 11 a.m., was intense; but Mirabehn, hardy as ever, was enduring it in Spartan conditions. For most of us three days seemed quite sufficient at this time of year. We made good use of the time, going all over the government estate on an elephant and seeing – among other things – really Gargantuan compost heaps. We also visited a camp of Thibetan weavers, who come every winter – perhaps because it is less bitterly cold here than it is in the hills. After seeing them at work[1] and

[1] These weavers work in wool. For spinning they do not use a wheel, but a *takli* (spindle) which is spun like a top. The wool is spun from a distaff, held over the shoulder and tucked into the clothes at the back of the neck. When the *takli* is used for spinning wool it seems usual for the spinner to sit on a raised platform or on the roof of his hut, allowing the yarn to reach ground level before winding it.

admiring some of the products we were entertained by the Lama in his hut of bamboo and pampas grass. He sang many songs, accompanied by the ringing of bells, the beating of drums and a strange noise from a wind instrument.

At Hardwar, where we spent some hours on the way back to Delhi, we were interested in two notices. One, in a large private house, informed us that 'spitting and deciphering' were forbidden. This worried Michael Scott a good deal, not because he wanted to spit, but because he wanted to 'decipher' the other word. The other notice, on a bridge, announced that non-Hindus, other than officers on duty, were forbidden by the Municipality to use it.

Hardwar, it is true, is one of the seven holy places of the Hindus, and (like Allahabad) a great centre of pilgrimage at the time of the *Kumbh Mela;* but we all knew well enough that this was the sort of thing which breeds communal friction. Indeed, when we reported it to some Hindu friends in Delhi they were most indignant, declared it to be contrary to the new constitution, and promised to take the matter up with the appropriate authorities without delay, demanding the removal of such notices as offensive to Moslems and others. On the whole this ready response of our Hindu friends at Delhi was very typical of what Hindus feel about communalism. They do honestly want a secular state, not a Hindu state. In big centres such as Delhi and Ahmedabad the drums of the mosque still call the Faithful to prayer, and most Hindus that I met – however bitterly some felt about Pakistan – had absolutely no thought of discriminating against their Moslem neighbours in the Indian Union. Riots have always been local, and confined to a relatively small part of the country.

Staying one night more in Delhi, I arrived at Bombay with about a week to spare before I was due to sail. Almost the first news I heard on my arrival was that Verrier Elwin was in Bombay. Having failed to meet him in the C.P. I was glad of the chance at last to hear him speak to a small meeting about his work among the aboriginal tribes. These primitive peoples had all loved Gandhi, he told us, and many refused to believe that he was dead. He spoke of their fear of outsiders – British or Indian. One, who had seen an aeroplane – a rare sight in the central jungles – had aptly described it as 'the vehicle of the God of Death'. The Tribal Welfare and Research Unit, which Verrier and a few friends have founded, is not a body engaged in purely academic research. Their records of the songs,

dances, myths and customs of the aboriginals can be, and already have been, of value to those who want to understand these people and treat them rightly. Verrier and his friends have succeeded in bringing about changes in government policy and have themselves undertaken educational work among the tribes, which might have done more harm than good if they had not acquired the necessary knowledge of the people and a respect for their culture. They have engaged in everything from digging wells to running a home for lepers and conducting a dispensary. All this requires money, for which Verrier was appealing at this meeting.

Until the last few days I stayed outside Bombay, in the suburb of Bandra, as the guest of an Indian friend, Prakash Tandon, and his Swedish wife. This was another happy consequence of the memorable voyage on the *Jal Azad*, when I had first met these two and their three beautiful children. Bandra is a curious place, with a considerable Catholic community (Indian and Anglo-Indian or half Portuguese) which was pampered by the Government from the time of the Sepoy Mutiny and has a long 'loyalist' tradition. English and Portuguese names are used by these Christians and England is still 'home' to some of them (even those who have never set foot in this island), their ways resembling the habits of the lower middle class in England about fifty years ago. To be a 'Christian' in Bandra is a communal distinction – not merely a matter of religious belief. ('Is so-and-so English?' 'No, he is a Christian.') The Tandons had several stories illustrating the nature of this cultural backwater. One woman – an Indian herself – had been worried about rationing because of 'the difficulty of feeding one's native servants'. Among these people 'we' has long meant themselves and the British – 'they' refers to other Indians. They use only western music, speak bad English as their first language and affect an English accent when using Hindustani words. In the past, members of this community were employed either by the British rulers, in the smaller administrative positions, or by British commercial houses. Their education, though in many respects deplorable, made them useful as clerks.

In many respects the problems of this small community, in the New India for which they were so utterly unprepared, resemble those of the Christian converts whom I met in the Central Provinces. Their religion, according to Ingrid Tandon, often shows traces of Hindu infiltration. One *ayah* whom she heard scolding a child ('If you aren't good, Jesus will turn you into a pig') must

clearly have had some dim conception of reincarnation in the back of her mind. Hindus (and Moslems too) have even 'adopted' one of the Catholic Churches, built on the site of an old Hindu temple, and kept up a fertility cult. Dolls are sold outside the church and women – irrespective of their religion – will buy one of these and present it to the Virgin, in the hope of being rewarded with a child.

Which reminds me. The three Tandon children gave me endless pleasure – Manu, Gautam and Maya, with her amber eyes and long plaits (ending, Indian fashion, with black silk tassels). These children spoke a mixture of English and Hindustani, but were liable to burst into Swedish too. There was a curious blend of culture in that friendly home, and a very good blend. Ingrid Tandon always wore Indian clothes and had a sad little story of meeting an Indian woman (a Christian) on a 'bus. The other woman, dressed in European style, as is common in her community, asked why Ingrid wore a *sari*. 'Because I live in India and am married to an Indian,' replied my hostess, 'why don't you do the same?' The Indian lady shook her head. 'Anybody can *see* that *you* are educated,' she replied. '*I* have to *show* it.'

Within a short walking distance of the residential suburb of Bandra is an old fishing village, which I explored with Ingrid, and further up the coast there was good swimming. Before I left, Prakash drove us out to see the new centre at Aaray, where a clean and adequate milk supply for Bombay is being organised under the direction of Dara Khurody – a pioneer who took training in Denmark and has adapted what he learnt to the solution of Indian problems. The city milk supply is quite inadequate and was recently considered – in the opinion of experts – much more dangerous than London sewer water. The centre proved to be a really impressive undertaking in hilly country, to the north of Bombay. Since it was started two years previously it had grown to house 2,800 buffaloes. It was making a profit on which the first charge was to be repayment of loan capital and the next would be extension, with the object of increasing the number of buffaloes to 12,800. The scheme, in addition to assuring a clean supply to the consumer, and ultimately an adequate supply for the whole city, is a model one for its combination of efficiency, co-operation, assurance of a steady market and scope for individual enterprise.

My last night in India was spent right in the heart of the city, with a friend who had a flat near the 'Apollo Bander'. In contrast

to the public occasion made of our arrival, the pacifist delegates departed very quietly. Indeed, my last taste of anything resembling publicity was quite accidental. Ingrid Tandon had come into Bombay with me, and we drove together in an ancient Victoria up a deserted street which was lined with soldiers. Apparently the street had been closed for a rehearsal of the Governor's drive on a state occasion, which was scheduled for the day before I left the country – the day when India was to be declared a Republic. I think we were allowed to pass owing to a misunderstanding, on the assumption that we were 'standing in' for the purpose of this rehearsal on behalf of His Excellency and Lady Singh. Anyway, it is as good an explanation as any other, and quite the pleasantest.

Westerners so commonly go about India obsessed with the idea that everybody is trying to swindle them that one small thing is perhaps worth mentioning. I was only once given wrong change, so far as I know, and that was on a 'bus during this last week in Bombay. As the mistake was to my advantage – or would have been, had I not pointed it out – I naturally wondered what conclusion would have been drawn by most Europeans had the mistake been to the advantage of the conductor. Incidentally, I also had money returned to me by a hawker at a station when I offered him too much through misunderstanding the price he had stated. There are plenty of rogues in most places, including India; but I see no reason to believe that they are any more common there, in spite of the provocation offered by poverty, than they are in other countries.

Before leaving India I was given a final taste of journalistic incorrigibility. *The Times of India* is no longer British owned, and it no longer specialises in defaming Indian leaders or British friends of India. But journalism is still journalism; and my only speech in Bombay was so reported in this paper that it read as a very flattering account of the New India – whereas, in point of fact, I had carefully avoided committing myself one way or the other. To this the reporter had added other inventions of his own which made no sense at all. And though my visit had been all too short, I was not pleased to find that my supposed optimism about India was said to have been based upon a 'three weeks' tour'.

Among the people I met during those last days was one who had been a boy at Sabarmati in 1930. I had specially enquired about him, for I had enjoyed the company of the youngsters at Sabarmati and among them Rasik had always been my favourite. I had sometimes

wondered what sort of man he had become. The last I had ever seen of him in 1930 was when he went with Abbas Tyabji to break the salt laws; and in my journals his reported defiance of the magistrate at his trial was the final record. Meeting anyone after twenty years always involves some speculation, the more so if it is a boy who has grown up, but Rasik was no disappointment. He seemed surprised, but very pleased, that I should have remembered him so well and taken steps to find him.

I reminded him of his own words, as reported to me after his arrest and conviction in 1930: 'I have no faith in this Court and its "laws", which I consider to be illegal. At such a place I have nothing to say. Whatever I have to say, I will say it before my own *Swaraj* Government, whenever it may be established.'

'We didn't think,' said I, 'that the day would come so soon.'

Rasik was silent for a moment. Then he said: 'With me that day was another boy – you might remember him.' He mentioned the name, but I had forgotten it.

'He became a Communist. Not long ago he was killed. This was done by my own *Swaraj* Government. He was a great friend of mine . . .'

On January 26th the Republic was declared. Twenty years previously I had spent the day travelling. The train had been so full that only the silver tongue of Chaturvedi had secured me a seat with some railway officials, in a compartment supposed to be exclusively for their use. We had passed through Chauri-Chaura – an ill-omened name, for it had been on account of serious riots there that Gandhi had suspended his first Civil Disobedience movement. But that day all was quiet at Chauri-Chaura. Perfect order had prevailed almost throughout the country, the ceremonial reading of the Independence Resolution and hoisting of the National Flag being unaccompanied even by speeches, in most places. On January 26th, 1950 it was clear that the order of the day was to be very different.

Streets and houses everywhere[1] now displayed the national flag – that emblem once penalised so savagely in the town of Sholapur (under Martial Law) that to carry it was then punishable with ten years' imprisonment. That was in May 1930. Boys had been flogged for the same offence. Surely I ought to be glad that the long struggle had ended so triumphantly. But the events of Republic Day failed to arouse any response in me. All that really mattered, I knew very well

[1] With the exception of most Christian houses at Bandra.

was political freedom, which had already been achieved, and social emancipation, which had yet to come. The Republic meant absolutely nothing – it was not even, properly speaking, a Republic at all.

In fact Republic Day was something of a comedy. On the front page of the *Bombay Chronicle* there was headlined the message of H.M. King George VI, congratulating the Indian Government on 'the foundation of the Indian Republic within the Commonwealth'. The statesmen of Britain and India have been much congratulated on the 'formula' which they evolved; though what it all means I have yet to discover. What really made me smile was the wording used in this message. One naturally asks *what* commonwealth? 'The British Commonwealth of Nations' may be (and certainly is, so far as I am concerned) a euphemism for an Empire, which is not a commonwealth at all. It is, if you like, a thumping lie, since it implies that the tribesmen of Kenya, the British 'owners' of the land stolen from them and – say – Mr Herbert Morrison enjoy common rights and share common interests, their 'weal' or welfare being a matter of common concern. But, however foolish the phrase may be, it does connote something. We know what somebody is talking about if he refers to the British Commonwealth. In the royal message the word 'British' had to be left out for reasons of tact; and what remained had no meaning whatsoever. The King certainly did his best – it was this new republicanism which made things so difficult. How can anyone hope to say anything very intelligible about a republic which acknowledges the crown of another country as a 'symbol of unity' and remains part of the British Empire whilst refusing to call it an Empire or to face the fact that it is British?

There are, however, heroes in our midst to whom the impossible is unknown. In the same paper (the *Bombay Chronicle* of January 26th) Fenner Brockway made the whole thing clear. It appeared that there were serious differences between India and Britain still, relating to foreign policy and imperialism. India was not playing 'Western Bloc' politics, and had no part in British imperialism. But two such minor differences, apparently, need not prevent the closest co-operation between Nehru and Attlee, which had, in fact, been achieved – though a change of government in Britain might involve 'a serious change in psychology', whatever that may mean. Moreover Britain and the Labour Party, though they practised imperialism, on Mr Brockway's admission, were 'democratic'. And so on. But after reading this article I was no less puzzled than before as to just what

this new Republic was, and what were its relations with the alleged Commonwealth, British or otherwise.

There was to be an 'amnesty' for prisoners in celebration of Republic Day, but this was not to include 'habitual offenders, persons detained for failure to furnish security' and other specified classes – in fact, it did not cover any of those who had best reason to complain of their imprisonment; for under the Criminal Procedure Code 'habitual offenders' could be imprisoned without any specific charge being brought against them[1] and the old British law on this point had not yet been modified in any way. 2,521 Communists (according to *The Times of India*) also remained in detention. Prisoners condemned to death were not to be executed on January 26th or 27th, for which no doubt they were grateful.

The first President of the new Republic was to be Rajenda Prasad, a man whom I had known slightly from my first visit and seen quite recently at Sevagram. There he had 'presided' (in a rather formal sense, as he did not actually chair the sessions) over the Pacifist Conference. I only remember two occasions on which he spoke during the sessions – once to defend the practice of imprisonment without trial, and once to put the Indian case when we were discussing the friction between India and Pakistan. Knowing that he had already accepted nomination for a post in which he would be head of all the armed forces of India, I had not been surprised at the nature of his small contribution to our discussions. What had really surprised me was not his acceptance of office as President of the Republic but the fact that he had agreed to preside at Sevagram, or even to attend. I find people like Nehru much easier to understand. I have never felt that I knew where Prasad stood; and sometimes I have wondered whether he himself has any clear ideas on the subject.

All day, on January 26th, people streamed into Bombay, and by night-fall the streets were hot with humanity – so hot with breath and bodies that one never felt the sudden coolness which comes with evening in the Indian winter. The *tamasha* was something which had not merely to be seen but heard, felt and smelt to be believed. The crowds eventually immobilised all vehicles on the main streets, and in the side roads they could only move very slowly between long

[1] Under Sections 109 and 110 of the Code. The nature of these sections was fully discussed in Chapter VIII of my *White Sahibs* with examples of the way in which the law was actually applied in the 'thirties.

halts. An old man I once knew used to say, when the supposed responsibility of the pedestrian for street accidents was under discussion, that it was surprising how few fatal accidents were occasioned by pedestrians colliding with one another. Here, however, quite the most dangerous thing on the road appeared to be the human biped. Solid masses of them surged, swayed and crushed one another. It would have been very easy to have been trampled under foot if there had been room to fall down; but there seldom was.

And yet, somehow, in odd corners which just escaped the great mainstreams of *homines sapientes* the inevitable sleeping figures were still to be found that night. There they lay like corpses, with sheets pulled over their heads, as I had seen them when I first came to Bombay; and no amount of noise, no trampling feet within inches of them, not yet the great occasion itself could alter their habits.

From a high, flat roof I saw the illuminations. The whole of Bombay lay below and about us, each landmark clearly outlined by its own lights. Prakash Tandon, who had taken me there with his family, fortunately pointed out the Apollo Bander. I knew it only as the place from which I had gone on a motor launch to visit the Elephant Caves, as part of the programme on the arrival of the delegates in November. When I came down I soon realised that it was now my sole guide; for my host in Bombay lived somewhere near there; and with me was his small daughter (aged eight) who had no more idea than I had as to where we were. We said goodbye to the Tandons, who were to make their way back to Bandra as well as they could by side roads, and I set off with the child in the direction – so I hoped – of the Apollo Bander.

We had luck. Somehow we made our way through the dense crowds until Vimula recognised some place. For twenty minutes, after that, this small child led me through alleys and back streets till we reached her father's home. The noise continued all night, and I lay awake most of the time. It seemed strange and appropriate that I should be leaving India the day after the inauguration of the Republic. Whatever criticisms I might make of the whole peculiar set-up it was, after all, the formal ending of an era. For me that meant *Nunc dimittis* from this land of strange contrasts. I thought long of its wealth and its poverty, its violence and its non-violence, of the princely generosity of rapacious capitalists and of the confusion of good and evil in Indian politics. How would I ever sort all this out and find the true pattern behind it – or was there any pattern at all?

Michael Scott and four other delegates sailed with me on the 27th – two of them people with whom I had come out on the *Jal Azad*. I felt I had already said goodbye to India before I ever went on board. I had been saying it all over India for weeks. But I was glad that a few of our Indian friends came to see us off. As Bombay faded from our sight I was already beginning to sort out my impressions, trying to map out this book. It seems now a long time since I began the first chapter, on the *Stratheden;* but I have still to attempt the most difficult thing, which is to summarise my own observations and to answer as well as I can the question: *What did Gandhi really leave behind for India, or for the world?* The second anniversary of his death, on January 30th, passed almost unnoticed, I suspect, on the *Stratheden*. But in India it must surely have had a sobering effect after the events of the 26th. All over the country the more thoughtful people must have asked themselves that same question. And some, at least, must have known that the answer lay in their own hearts and hands.

Soft February sunshine – a rare gift – lit the docks at Tilbury when we arrived at the end of our journey. Even here the river justified its title as the Silver Thames, glittering in the morning light. Coming from the land where all rivers are sacred, I remembered how Pope, rising above his own satirical genius and the limitations of a stylised age, saw for a moment the vision of a new England, worthy of the highest patriotism. It was in those lines, the finest in *Windsor Forest*, that the poet prophesied the reign of peace:

O stretch thy reign, fair Peace, from shore to shore,
Till conquest cease and slavery be no more;
Till the freed Indians in their native groves
Reap their own fruits, and woo their sable loves . . .

No need to quibble over the fact that it was the Red Indians whom Pope had in mind. The sentiment and the words still serve their purpose. And it is in such a world that his prophesy may yet be fulfilled:

Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind.

It is a good thought. But love of one's country has been so perverted to cover every evil that I had to re-learn it from the old Sage of Sabarmati before I could find a place for it in my philosophy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Terraces of privilege and loathing.

ALUN LEWIS

ONCE, IN the nineteen-thirties, an ex-suffragette took me to a meeting of what I nearly called her *confrères*. . . . Many speeches were made about the Good Old Times, and I remembered the remark once made by a friend of mine, that if one spent several miserable months shipwrecked and living on a raft one would say afterwards 'Ah, but those were grand days we had on that raft.' I often felt like that on my second Indian visit. I met men and women who had changed immeasurably, and often I felt that they were more prosperous but certainly less happy. Then the paradox struck me, that the struggle for freedom brings out the best in people – its achievement too often brings out the worst. Such was once the case with the Society of Friends, which was at its best in the time of persecution but was almost destroyed by prosperity in the eighteenth century, and only saved by such men as John Woolman.

But to return to my ex-suffragettes: after many nostalgic speeches a woman suddenly dared to speak of tasks still needing the same loyal devotion – and I am glad to say that she did not speak as a feminist but as a human being. She spoke, among other things, of prison reform. In those Good Old Days when suffragettes had been imprisoned, she said, they had come out with knowledge of jail conditions and enthusiasm for reform. There had indeed been some reforms, but these were inadequate. The speech fell flat – these old veterans had not met to survey new worlds to conquer, but to celebrate their own past adventures. Then a pioneer of the Women Police rose from her seat and expressed her strong disapproval of what had been said.

The police-woman said – these were her actual words, as far as I remember – 'I was in prison before the war as a suffragette and I have often visited prisons since the war in my capacity as a police officer. I can assure you that conditions have completely changed.' There was no trace of irony in the voice of that woman or in her dull, worthy face. She was quite unconscious of any subjective difference,

arising from her own altered status, which might have accounted for the 'complete change'. Being the only male guest I felt the restraint imposed by good manners; but as I caught the eye of the other woman, the enthusiast for prison reform, we both laughed aloud.

I was to remember this incident many times on my second visit to India, and I often quoted it when asked about the changes in the country. I had visited it twenty years previously as an unknown young man, and now I was returning as an honoured guest of those in power. I had travelled third class on most occasions – now, by arrangement with the Government of India, I had, in common with the other delegates, a special concession to travel first class at cheap rates. The Government of the United State of Saurashtra went even further, for the three of us who travelled there went with our two Indian hosts in the special saloon (like a royal railway suite) formerly used by Sir Prabhashankar Pattani. Granted that I travelled as far in two and a half months as I did during the ten months of my previous visit, that our programme was often exhausting and that railway journeys were my chief opportunities to do any writing, the fact remains that I was seeing India from a very different angle. Things had indeed 'changed' – for myself.

I made my own decision regarding this matter of travelling, and it may have been the wrong one. Third class travel, incidentally, was far more difficult than it had been twenty years previously[1] – unless one was prepared to fight for a place on the train it would in many cases have been impossible to board the third class coaches at all. Probably the right way to see India is to see it on foot, as a *sadhu* – but you cannot do that in two and a half months. I used my concession, as did the other delegates, and was often glad enough merely for the privilege of a reasonably good night's rest between strenuous days, or following the strain of conference sessions, with nights of publicity work and correspondence.

But though I could to some extent justify my own position, and knew that third class travel in such a heavy programme would have caused a complete breakdown in health, I could not get over this complete discrepancy between the two viewpoints, making all comparisons far too subjective, dependent upon my own changed circumstances. There were, indeed, many other differences between

[1] Only once on my previous visit did I travel on a train with passengers on the roof and footboards. This was later to become quite a familiar sight.

my previous visit and this highly programmed tour of Northern and Central India. It was not simply that I attended receptions at places where I would have been most unwelcome in 1929–30 (Government House, New Delhi, for example, and Government House, Bombay). The outstanding fact was that I often met the same people in such altered circumstances that comparisons were impossible. My companions of twenty years ago had been jail-birds who, even when they were not in prison, lived a great deal more simply, and by more Spartan standards, than most soldiers on active service. Where these men and women had taken the place of the previous rulers I could see some changes in the individuals; but the world in which they and I had once lived had now – surely – passed beyond their view. In so far as I kept their company that world eluded me, too.

A phrase used by an ironical old Quaker comes to my mind, recalling two analogies which I have already used – that of Quaker history and that of the two views on prisoners. 'In the old days,' he would say, 'the Quakers used to be in the dock. Today they sit on the Bench.' That was approximately the difference I found in so many of my old Indian friends – men and women whom I still love for all they have been in the past, and for something that goes deeper than politics.

The late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel may be taken as an example – he, at least, was too shrewd a man to think that people like Richard Gregg approved of his policy. And, apart from that, the Deputy Prime Minister, India's 'Strong Man', was far too powerful to care. In fact I was surprised when I was told in Delhi that the Sardar wanted to see me. At first I did not believe this, and then another person remarked: 'Vallabhbhai said he only wanted to see Richard and Reginald.' That explained everything. The old man was still sentimental enough to remember with some kind of pleasure the American, Richard Gregg, and the Englishman, Reginald Reynolds, who had offered their small tribute of service in the days of struggle. I responded at once in the same spirit. To me there were two Vallabhbhais, and always will be. There was the ruthless and powerful politician who now ruled India perhaps even more – or so it was said – than the Prime Minister. But there was also the 'Sadar' who won that title by leading 80,000 peasants of Bardoli to victory in a no-tax campaign, Gandhi's great lieutenant from the year 1928 onwards.

And above all, as I looked at that wrinkled face, where the eyes still twinkled to recall some adventure of the past, I remembered little personal incidents, like the day at Lahore when some generous friend sent a vast hamper of vegetables to the Gandhi camp. Onions were found among them, and those were the days before Gandhiji had discovered the great value of onions and garlic – they were still classified by ashramites as 'stimulating foods', enemies of *Bramhacharya* (Chastity) and almost indecent to mention. Mirabehn, sternest in her orthodoxy, as became a convert from heathen England, put those onions resolutely aside and I asked with alarm what would become of them. I heard that they were to be thrown away, and my immediate protest was suddenly supported by the formidable Sardar. 'Reginald and I will eat them,' he said firmly; and that we did, sitting a little apart and viewed with some horror by our companions, rather as though we had been cannibals. There is, of course, a sound social law governing the eating of onions, that all should partake or none; but I am still glad that Vallabhbhai and I broke that law.

When we met in 1950 our conversation must have resembled that of two men who had been at school together and followed widely different paths for many years. Trivial but tender were the memories that bridged the difference of age and outlook. I had no intention of saying anything to the Sardar on any subject of importance. From an outsider who had been only a few months in the country criticism would have been impertinence; and I knew him well enough to be certain he had no more desire to receive polite flattery than I had to offer it. But when the old man said to me: 'Bapuji was always talking of you,' I knew that I would have gone a long way just to hear those words – there was such warmth in them. A friend had arranged that Michael Scott should go with me, and on the comparatively neutral ground of South Africa Michael made some headway. But once more I knew that meeting the same people gave me no clue to the changes in the country – only to the change in a few individual lives and the outlook of those who had been tested and tried by two years of success.

There was one thing that I tried hard to avoid in India and I am still trying to avoid it, though I may not have been entirely successful. It is the conceit which made a popular writer, not many years ago, give the title *Verdict on India* to a very superficial book which contained more than a reasonable quota of prejudice and

misinformation. If I have risked some generalisations I want it to be clearly understood that they are based upon my own highly subjective impressions. I do not wish to make wholesale criticisms of Indians, and I am particularly anxious to avail myself of the privilege – arising from the new situation since 1947 – of being neutral in the internal politics of the country. As I have sometimes had to remind my Dublin friends, all that English radicals gained themselves from Irish independence was freedom from a long headache. I work on the assumption that in India, as in Ireland, this neutrality is my personal prerogative and my plain duty as an outsider, also that any 'verdict' by one man on a subcontinent can only be a verdict on himself. Nevertheless there have been difficult moments when both English people and Indians have pressed me to commit myself at least on some points. If I say some rash things I hope that my tempters will not be among my accusers.

Once, in Calcutta, when I had to speak at one of those public receptions so frequently organised for us by Indian generosity, I remembered suddenly a story about Gandhi's visit to London in 1931. He went to see an old friend, who had shared his hard life, many years previously, a staunch companion who had given up much and taken great risks in his devoted adherence to a good cause. Gandhiji found him living very differently, surrounded by every evidence of affluence. He stood in the hall of his friend's house, paused in a bewildered manner and then – '*So you have got on*' was all he said. I felt suddenly that this was all I really had to say to the New India, or rather that it was all I had to say to most of my old friends, who now ruled it. And then, even as I spoke, I remembered all those men and women I had met in the 'constructive centres', the nameless ones, unknown (like those who have made Indian independence possible, for without them even Gandhi would have been powerless.) I realised again, as though this truth were a new revelation and not as old as humanity itself, that these unknown workers were the real salt of the earth – the people whose names would never appear in the headlines of the newspapers.

And I heard myself pleading that these men and women, to whom independence was not an end but a beginning, the people who were continuing the great work of social and spiritual reconstruction begun by Gandhi, should not be forgotten. India offered now so many attractive jobs for the educated, so many 'plums' which had once fallen into British hands; and the glamour of political

independence, with new personal opportunities, too easily obscured the need for people who would still live a 'soldier's life', campaigning for little remuneration and little thanks against poverty, disease and ignorance. The fact that such an army still exists is to me the most hopeful thing in India today; and an urgent necessity, as I believe, is what I attempted to do that day in Calcutta – to make the townspeople, especially the 'intellectuals', conscious of the continued need for this work and of opportunities very different from those which generations of Indian University Students have been taught to prize.

This brings me to a last generalisation, as rash as those I have already made. The Indian 'intelligentsia', or such members of it as I met, gave me the impression of being very disillusioned about the present government. That, of course, is the special privilege (and perhaps even the special duty) of the 'intellectuals' in any country and at any time – though it is no more justifiable in India than elsewhere. In Bombay, particularly, I noticed this tendency, and I welcomed it as a sign that this section of the population, at least, was not to be contented with mere political independence – a change of masters which involved few major changes in the social structure. To them too, independence was a beginning and not an end; and I regard it as being to their credit rather than otherwise that after two years they were already impatient.

By that I do not mean that independence is valueless unless it produces vast social reforms immediately – I value independence for its own sake and for the social changes which can only be achieved in a politically free country, however slowly they may come about. But the old catch-word 'gradualism', which made slowness almost an end in itself was at best a perversion of the truth, and in our own time it has been exploded by the speed at which events move. If those who want peace are going to move 'gradually' they will find that the forces making for war will not obligingly wait until the gradualists have martialled their cohorts. And in India hunger will not wait for gradualists to act – famine threatens every year. So in every really vital problem I am in favour of the impatient people every time, by comparison with those who make a virtue of procrastination and deliberately continue the legal protection of social abuses which they have the power to remove.

But speed does not necessarily mean taking short cuts, and I have for some time felt that the idealist in politics is always inclined to

make this mistake. All corruption, graft, exploitation and oppression, in India or anywhere else, rests ultimately upon lust for power – by no means confined to the few who wield it – and the ignorance of the masses. In the case of the masses I am thinking of their lack of education (particularly) in methods of co-operation, in the best use of their existing resources and personal capabilities, and the lack of a common *faith* through which alone passive resistance to oppression can be carried out. On such a common faith personal self-discipline can be built up and developed into corporate self-discipline – the very essence of Gandhi's *satyagraha* and (incidentally) of a non-governmental society. Any attempt at 'speed' which does not begin at this point may succeed in overthrowing a bad régime, but is unlikely to create a better. In India, and throughout the world, I believe that the really urgent task, in which we cannot afford to delay, is the education or re-education of the people as a whole – beginning with ourselves. And if that appears to contradict my observations about war and hunger, my reply is that, since these evils can only be met successfully by a revolution, both spiritual and social, any attempt to hurry ahead of that revolution is speed in the wrong direction, a dissipation of energy and a waste of precious time.

As to these young intellectuals of India, in Bombay I was struck – almost nostalgically – by the resemblance between the comments I heard and those of the malicious wits of Dublin. There was the same love of scandal, the same feeling that it would be disappointing if a scandal about some minister of state were untrue, but that even so it was better to invent the scandal than not to have one. I had not been twenty-four hours in India before I was asked what I thought of the 'Bania Raj'; and of one much revered Congress leader I was told: 'Of course, you know what Motilal Nehru said about him – that if he swallowed a nail it would come out as a cork-screw.' The usual stories of corruption were told with more than the usual amount of amusing detail, and the Literary Set was devoured (with cannibal ardour) as greedily as the rest. As in Dublin, the game appeared to be to knock everyone off his perch and make all appear equally ludicrous. There is even something essentially healthy in this iconoclasm.

It was not until I began to discuss the good work being done outside their own set, away from the political cockpit and beneath the notice of newspaper headlines that I discovered the limitations

of these intellectuals. Of the principles and practice of Basic Education they knew nothing – they might as well have been living in London for all they understood about it. Even more astonishing was my discovery that one Bombay writer – an experienced journalist who was proud of his knowledge regarding the less creditable secrets of Cabinet Ministers – had never so much as heard of the Bombay Milk Scheme, which is, after all, a little revolution in itself and an important piece of education by example in the general revolution which is so urgently needed in dairy-farming and Indian agricultural practice. The fact that this was happening, unnoticed, on the very doorstep of my Bombay friend struck me as symbolic. He was too interested in the sins of politicians in distant Delhi to see the beginnings of something very much more important in his own town.

That – to complete my rash generalisation – is the epitome of intellectualism, not in India alone but in most other countries of which I have any knowledge. It is peculiarly Indian only in the sense that the Indian middle-class is even further divorced than the middle-class in most other countries from the basic realities of life. This is the result, so far as I know, partly of a caste heritage in which, for countless generations, an elaborate hierarchy of professions has relegated the lowest social status to the most honest and useful forms of labour. Our own class system is similar and was at one time, perhaps, equally rigid. I remember that an Elizabethan authority once defined a gentleman as one 'who can live idly and without manual labour'.[1] This conception of social value is by no means dead in England even today, but a combination of circumstances has modified it. In the suburbs of London it is not *infra dig* to work on your allotment; and, indeed, certain forms of manual labour – such as gardening – are even considered 'genteel'. The middle-class wife in modern England is much less dependent upon servants; and what is more important psychologically is the fact that she tells you with pride of the work she has done in the house.

But only a minority of educated Indians would consider working in either kitchen or garden if they could possibly pay somebody else to do the work. Even more important is the different attitude to money. In England it has for some time been fashionable to be 'poor', although the 'poverty' of many of my upper middle-class friends would keep a few dozen people such as myself in more

[1] Sir Thomas Smith, *De Republica Anglorum* (1583).

comfort than we have ever known or even desired. Even so, insistence on this 'poverty', however fictitious, is still important.

It is evidence of a change, moral and psychological, in which the importance attached to wealth as a source of prestige has actually declined. It has nothing to do with political changes, though it may – if carried to its logical conclusion – bring about changes much more profound than any that can be achieved by political action. Even the discrepancy between our Western attitude to money and what we say about it is of importance. We hang on to it and pretend we are poor – affect to despise it and scheme to obtain it. Unless I completely misread this, it means (on the one hand) that we want money because it gives us a feeling of security in a chaotic society, providing us also with those luxuries to which we cling – that 'higher standard of living' which simply means a higher price paid for a less happy existence. But less and less is money the path to popularity and prestige, the greatest incentives to the accumulation of excessive wealth.

A vulgar display of wealth once made an 'impression', but that impression has diminished, and continues to diminish, whilst an adverse reaction becomes more and more common. The next bid for popularity, on the part of wealthy Englishmen and Americans, was through philanthropy; and the chief result was that, within two generations, the word 'charity' (a fine word which nineteenth century philanthropists debased beyond recognition) began to stink. It had to be avoided. After various experiments with endowments to national and public Trusts, the rich seem to have realised that the best thing to do about money is to keep quiet about it. And surely the next question which must arise is whether there is any point in anybody having more than enough to live comfortably, human needs being limited and other things – especially that esteem of our fellow men which most of us value – apparently going off the money market.

It is this subtle change which makes it possible for Mrs A. in England to tell her neighbours with pride of floors that she has scrubbed and dinners that she has cooked – even though neither statement may be strictly true. Meanwhile, in India, a lady under the misfortune of having to cook the dinner herself, who might be reasonably proud of having done a good job, may actually prefer you to think that it was done by her cook.

In the case of the 'intellectuals' these prejudices were undoubtedly

reinforced by the system of education introduced by the British. Purely academic, it turned out generations of lawyers, graduates in Arts, 'F.B.A.'s' and such products, but for two generations care was taken not to train men or women in those professions which dealt in practical knowledge – especially that technical knowledge which was so often used to prove the indispensability of British Rule. As I have already observed, Macaulay's policy of creating a new caste of de-nationalised Indian clerks and minor officials was completely successful; and the British despised their own creation with a peculiar loathing – the 'babu', pathetically trying to be British. The very term 'Wog', once used in contempt by Europeans for the people of a country upon which they had forced themselves, meant originally 'Westernised Oriental Gentleman'. The phrase was invented in the nineteenth century, in an honest official effort to secure more civility on the part of Europeans towards this class, in the hope that such hybrids would obtain more courtesy than the rest of their countrymen usually received. Characteristically, the British residents, especially the military, reserved what little respect they could spare for the Indian soldier, with a little for the peasant and none at all for the Westernised Gentleman.

As to the nature of Indian education, men trained in medicine, engineering, agriculture, forestry and other branches of practical knowledge cannot, as a rule, maintain for long the decadent attitude towards work which I have tried to indicate – though even here there are some notable exceptions, which I will mention presently. Medicine was, I believe, the first field of practical knowledge for which Indians were able to qualify in their own country. Only very late, and very slowly, with the maximum of obstruction, were Indians allowed to qualify for responsible work in forestry and admitted into the I.F.S. The lamentable shortage of Indian engineers is still one of the legacies of our negative policy in that field – it was probably because the British rulers realised that Indian engineers meant an independent Indian industrialism; and not without reason were Indians excluded, for many years, from any responsible posts in the Air Force and the mechanised units. The secrets of mechanical power, both civil and military, were kept a close monopoly as long as possible. I state this merely as a fact – without reference to my own views on militarism and on mechanisation.

If that were the whole story it might well be argued that India lost little of any real value and was saved, for a time, from much

that is deplorable in our civilisation. But by some grotesque process, whether deliberate or accidental, orthodox education in India has become a caricature of all that is most ridiculous in our own system. Everything is sacrificed to passing examinations which enable a man to put a few letters after his name – how valueless the educated Indian often realises later. 'Our B.A.,' said the principal of an Indian college to me, 'is about equivalent to your Higher Certificate.' Yet, in spite of this, all 'orthodox' education is geared to examination standards, often from the earliest years. In one case I heard of a child of seven who was found hard at work late one evening – at about 9.30 p.m. When the visitor – a friend of mine – expressed astonishment the reply of the child's mother was that 'he must get through his matriculation.' 'Couldn't that wait until later?' my friend asked. No, it couldn't. Mother was taking no chances.

A young student once asked me whether degrees were rated as highly in England as they are in India.

'I think not,' I told him. 'I have no degree, nor has my wife, but we get along. Nobody bothers.'

'Over here,' he replied sadly, 'you can get nowhere without a degree. You can't get a job.'

It was symptomatic. 'You can't get a job' did not refer to the hundreds of millions who obviously had no degrees yet earned some sort of a living. Education in England is not so utterly soul-destroying that an educated man cannot become a farmer, or even a farm-labourer – I've worked on the land myself. Or such a man may work in a garage or join the merchant service. But in India – and again I shall have some vitally important exceptions to make later – he must either pass through the gateway of examinations to a sedentary job, be it only a clerk in an office, or sponge indefinitely on his family. (Even with the coveted degree this may still be his fate.) It is not entirely his fault. He has not, as a rule, undergone any hardening process enabling him to compete on equal terms with Indian manual workers – surely the toughest in the world for their size. (Consider the weights that any undersized coolie will lift and carry on his head.) And the mental and spiritual background of the educated Indian is such that only a spiritual revolution can make him even consider the idea of manual work.

As an instance of the rigidity of this Indian hierarchy of professions (something that has continued while caste, in its purely religious aspect, is rapidly breaking down) I may mention the refugees from

Pakistan. Except for some of the Punjabis (who are endowed with a certain virility and adaptability, as Pandit Nehru remarked to me when we were discussing their problem) most of the refugees, *irrespective of circumstances* have tried to resume their previous occupations. In a sense this is natural enough. But when, in over-crowded Delhi, one sees the thousands of little shops set up by the 50,000 refugees in the city one begins to have a great deal of sympathy with the Indian Government in its efforts to re-settle such refugees in the country. It is a fight against generations of prejudice.

Only a small proportion of the refugees from Pakistan could be classed as 'intellectuals', and at first sight these observations may appear digressive. I mention the matter because it illustrates a problem that lies deeper than that of the purely academic education from which the intelligentsia suffers. It goes even beyond the middle-class, for manual workers are often as unadaptable; and even among the *Harijans* there is still to be found the paradox of caste distinctions among outcastes – distinctions which were even more rigid when 'untouchability' was still strongly entrenched in Hindu society. In the case of the refugees I was told by Pandit Nehru of one camp (which I unfortunately had no time to visit) where excellent pioneer work had been done, first in clearing jungle land, then in cultivation and setting up local industries. Here some thousands of Punjabis had shown great adaptability with both the desire and the capacity to learn new trades. But for the most part the story of Delhi is more typical. From a national point of view the addition of thousands of redundant shops to this city merely means that the previous shopkeepers have a harder struggle, not a single useful product being added to the sum total of India's real wealth. India merely has so many more mouths to feed, so many more bodies to clothe, without any increase in her resources.

The situation is, in fact, a perfect exposure of the fallacious reasoning which regards the 'creation of employment' as the solution of a social problem; for employment has indeed been created by these refugees for themselves, but the country would be no worse off if they were paid to do nothing. The standpoint of these refugees, however, is simple and – given their premises – unanswerable. 'I am a shopkeeper. My father and my grandfather were shopkeepers. How can you expect me to do anything but keep a shop?' How they would fare on a desert island one can only imagine; but not being on a desert island many of them regard it as proper that

the Indian Government, if unable to set them up in their previous line of business, should keep them indefinitely as pensioners.

With a complete recognition of all that these people have suffered, with wholehearted sympathy for them and a full recognition of the splendid efforts made by many to rehabilitate themselves, I still feel that in this matter the Indian Government deserves more appreciation than it generally receives in India for its efforts to deal constructively with an extremely difficult situation. And I feel that, without blaming the refugees, one has to realise that their misfortunes include this occupational rigidity which is so often found among them, and among the Indian people as a whole. It is the same kind of rigidity which makes a man go hungry rather than eat food to which he is unaccustomed or food which in some way fails to conform with a caste law. Both of these situations have been known, even in times of famine.

Having digressed so far on the subject of these refugees, as an illustration of social rigidity in India, I ought in fairness to add that similar experiences have not been unknown in the West, in very similar circumstances. I well remember one particular occasion in the middle 'thirties, when many of us in England were doing all we could to help refugees from Germany. One day a man and his wife, young enough to have started life in some new field of enterprise and apparently in good bodily health, came to see my wife and myself. They were made welcome as victims of anti-Semitism who had been told that we might be able to help and advise them as to their rehabilitation in Britain. It so happened that I had recently been consulted about the best use of some land in the West of England – the owner, who had a conscience about refugees and also about possessing a disused garden which she could not cultivate herself, was willing to give free lodging in her house to a refugee couple, with the free use of this large garden to develop for marketable produce.

It was the only hopeful offer I had in hand at the moment, and I mentioned it. There was no discussion of practical difficulties, such as some training and a little capital. Without going into such questions our guests waved their hands in dismay. 'But ve do not *vant* to vork vith our hands' – those were the very words that shattered the scheme (and us). It was a sentence which we have never forgotten. Other well-intentioned friends of ours had similar experiences. Nevertheless I would still maintain that, taking the

Western peoples as a whole (and perhaps this is true of the British, the Americans and the Irish more than of the others) the prejudice against manual work is less common among the middle classes than it is among those classes in India.

So, if we consider the cause of the present ineffectiveness of the Indian 'intellectuals', it must be traced, in the first place, to long-standing traditions which have deep roots in Indian society. Gandhi's campaign for opening all temples to *Harijans* was a good move, a very courageous step at the time when it was first taken, and has proved very effective, but only in a limited sphere. Gandhiji knew well enough that it was only a beginning, and his own work went very much further. The legal 'abolition' of 'untouchability' is probably much less effective, though superficially it appears to be more far reaching. You cannot by a legal statute make people *respect* other people, and the work they do. And the relics of caste prejudice, shading imperceptibly into a new class snobbery, have roots that would still remain untouched, even if 'untouchability' were completely eradicated.

As to the educational factor, so important in the emasculation of the 'intellectuals', I had one surprise on my recent visit to India that made me realise how little orthodox education had adapted itself to the needs of the country, even when applied to a practical subject. I stayed at an Agricultural College, an American foundation still mainly financed by American money, but receiving a small grant from the Government. I was shown many interesting things – improved instruments, fascinating experiments. And then I noticed something – the appearance of the people working in the fields. They did not look like students.

'How many acres have you?' I asked my host.

'About six hundred,' he replied.

'And how many students?'

'About three hundred.'

'And who do the work – on the land?'

'Hired labourers.'

I drew a long breath and he laughed. 'You've hit it,' he said, 'that's the snag.'

'But why . . . ?'

'Examinations. If they are to get their B.Sc. there is no time to do farming.'

'But it's preposterous!'

He shrugged his shoulders. I knew he was in a helpless position – a junior member of the staff, with no hope of changing the course of education in a big institution. Against his enthusiasm and submerged impatience were the tradition of the place and of examination standards generally in Indian education, probably the Government officials and quite certainly the parents and the students themselves. They did not *want* to learn to become good farmers. They wanted some letters to put on their notepaper and visiting cards.

'How many of them go back to the villages?'

'Very few – hardly any.'

'What becomes of them all, then?'

'They get government jobs – in some Department. It's all a bit depressing.'

That night we talked late. He was a really good man – not just a fault-finder in the affairs of others, but the sort of man whose discontent begins with himself. 'Tell us what you really think,' he would say, 'about our way of living.'

'What's worrying you?'

His wife spoke. 'We've been used to living more simply and we were happier then. Here we live in European style. Once I wore a *sari* – here I can't: I should feel self-conscious.'

It was then that I suddenly saw, or thought that I saw, some fresh light on the whole problem.

'You're Western,' I said, 'and you've no need to be ashamed of it. Twenty years ago an English man or woman here might well have been ashamed. I was myself. One wore Indian clothes, and *khaddar* at that, to express one's sympathy with the national struggle – at least, a handful of us did. Today it's all different: that national struggle is over. We've left some unpleasant legacies and still have a duty to do what we can as individuals; but what exactly *can* we do? The need is no longer for national liberation but for social emancipation. What does it matter whether you wear a *sari* or a frock, whether you sit on a chair or on the floor? What does it matter whether you eat with your fingers or with a knife and fork? You have answered your own question about the *sari* – if you can't wear one now without feeling self-conscious, you had much better not wear it. But I'll tell you what I think *does* matter.'

What I said then comes back to me now very forcibly, because it represented a sudden and unexpected revolution in my own point of view. Briefly stated it was this – that we Westerners really had a

possible contribution now to the needs of India, one which I had never previously considered: and that, of all unlikely things, it was *simplicity*. Not, as yet (and perhaps never) the austere simplicity of an Indian *ashram*, but the simplicity of educated people who were not ashamed to work. I remembered Cowper's lines about 'John Company':

With oriental vices stuffed thy mind,
But left their virtues and thine own behind.

Perhaps, after all, many of the things which I have most condemned in my own countrymen, as I have studied their ways in India during two centuries, were not really 'Western' traits at all. I began to wonder whether some of the worst crimes of England and Englishmen had been committed through the acceptance by English people of those 'oriental vices' and the complete neglect (as Cowper put it) of the virtues of both countries. Quite certainly both Clive and Hastings justified themselves in their own eyes by appealing to what they regarded as the customs of the country; and English people have done the same ever since. 'You will probably not like the way we treat our native servants,' said an Englishman to me on my first voyage to India, 'but that is the only way – wealthy Indians behave in the same manner.' It was no accident that most of the worst social institutions of India were so carefully preserved under British rule – landlordism (though that system we created ourselves) the feudal principalities and (in the police and armed forces) even the ban on 'untouchables'. British rule was an imitation of all that was worst in India interwoven with some of our own worst institutions. The Viceroy affected the pomp of the Moghuls; but the best thing that India had produced, the village system with its *panchayats*, was systematically destroyed.

In my *White Sahibs in India*, written thirteen years ago, I devoted a long chapter to the value of the village councils and the way in which they had been destroyed. What I did not see then was the extent to which we had not merely destroyed Indian virtues, but imitated Indian vices. I do not know if this fact in any way mitigates the charges against British rule: in any case the question is no longer one of present politics but of past history – purely academic except in so far as knowledge and understanding of history may quicken our sense of responsibility with regard to present problems in India and elsewhere. But when I realised the extent to which our faults

had so often been faults of imitation it did make me wonder for the first time about those 'virtues left behind'. And as I talked with my friends of the agricultural college this thought suddenly took hold of me.

'There is one simple test,' I said, 'which should take one a long way out here. People like us live very simply at home. Not as simply, we'll agree, as the Indian peasant or those constructive workers in the villages. But our middle-class life is simplicity itself compared with the way the same class lives when it's transplanted to India, where labour is cheap and the educated people acquire false and corrupt values. As an immediate measure the simple standards of your own home life would be a revolution in educated circles here. You've nothing to be ashamed of in being Europeans. The worst shame of Europeans lies in the fact that so many of them ape the worst kind of Indians. When Kipling wrote about there being no ten commandments East of Suez he had in mind the maharajahs, *zemindars* and swindling *banias*, whose habits his class so faithfully copied, "wielding a truncheon with one hand and picking a pocket with the other", as Sheridan said of John Company. When we've learnt to be really English again we'll still have a long way to go – a lot still to learn from Gandhi, for instance. But first of all why not consider what is best in our own traditions?'

These thoughts must have been germinating for some time. Maybe it was a young Indian friend in Saurashtra who first put it in my mind – this idea that in quite a simple, unassuming and almost unconscious way we had something to offer India, provided that we kept our eyes on what was best in our own traditions and respected what was best in the traditions of Indians. I had merely been packing some things for a night journey into my bedding and rolling it up when a young man, well educated and (I believe) well-to-do, came and helped me, demonstrating a better way of securing the bundle.

'You could have left this to the servants,' he had said. We had been staying at the time in a Government guest house.

'No doubt; but I prefer to do it myself.'

As he fastened the strap the young man had said: 'We Indians' (meaning, as usual, those of his own class) 'always leave such things to servants. But we admire your independence. We have a lot to learn from you.'

Several things, I remember, had struck me as odd even at the

time, in that trivial conversation over such a small matter as packing and rolling one's own bedding. Firstly, the triviality itself – the fact that in such very elementary matters one could actually be setting a good example! Secondly there was the uneasy feeling that most English people living in India had long since acquired the habit of letting servants do everything imaginable for them – sometimes even to taking off their shoes. Who, I wondered, had this young man met (I do not think he had been to England) that he should know so much about the independent spirit of my own people?

Whether we could have taught anything to India so long as we sat on her back is at least doubtful, but I did have, that evening in Saurashtra, some glimmering of a new situation. It is odd, and almost unbelievable, but after all those years of tension between Government and people, between Britain and India, two years after our rule ended people in that country showed a respect for the British people which I am sure was never known when the British Raj was at the height of its power. Perhaps the same thing has happened to India which has happened to me. While India lay under the heel of Britain, and most of all when the struggle was at its height, Indians naturally tended to idealise themselves and to concentrate upon the worst traits in British character. I myself followed this tendency – the tendency of any nation at war – and in this 'war' I was pro-Indian. Today the situation which provoked this distortion has changed; but it is rare for objectivity to be restored so rapidly, and I think it shows real generosity of temperament in Indians that they have – or so many of them have – so completely re-adjusted themselves in so short a time.

It is ironical that after they had struggled against us for independence, it should have been our own independent spirit which many Indians came eventually to admire – the spirit which despises flunkeyism, abhorring alike the idea of being a flunkey or of being dependent upon the flunkeyism of others. I have sometimes felt that rickshaws – still so common in Calcutta – are symbolic of what is wrong in India. It is a degradation of humanity that one man should trot down the street, pulling another man – possibly twice as big as himself – the latter sometimes accompanied by a fat wife and two or three children. So long as Indian opinion tolerates that, it has a long way to go in realising true independence.[1] But if man

[1] It is a step forward that in some parts of India only bicycle rickshaws are now permitted. In Western India no rickshaws of any kind are used.

is degraded by employment as a human cab-horse, those who make use of his services are infinitely more degraded – unless they are too old or too sick to walk, and can find no other conveyance. How can a young man in good health let himself be pulled along by another man, without feeling a poor specimen of a worm, unless he is completely devoid of self-respect?

Again it must be noticed that Europeans – especially in the days before cars became common – accepted and encouraged this disgusting trade, though they did not initiate it. And yet every one of them must have known, during the past hundred years, that in their own native lands they would never have found any of their countrymen so downtrodden as to accept work of this kind. Also, from the time when the 'chairmen' ceased to function in the streets of European cities, I think most Western people, when in their own countries, would have been themselves ashamed even to use such a vehicle, suggestive of the barbaric vulgarity of a Tamerlane. In considering this symbol of slavery (the rickshaw) it is worth recalling that Gandhi on one occasion vehemently refused to use such a conveyance, though sick at the time. With that sure instinct of his, he knew that in no circumstances, however mitigating, ought he to countenance this practice. The pity is that Europeans, coming from a more bracing social climate, have so seldom felt the same conscientious scruples.

But the most depressing aspect of this common and tacit acceptance of such degrading practices leads me back again to the 'intellectuals'. The 'Parlour Bolshevik' has long been a familiar figure in London – the product of an academic Marxism, commonly inseminated in the universities to be hatched in the incubators of Hampstead. But the contrasts are not so vivid and personal in English life as they are in the life of India. The Hampstead *rentier* (who enjoys the luxury of abusing the system on which his material privileges depend) may be considered unimaginative. But in India the contrasts are within the very house or flat of such a person. As an educated man he is almost certain to have servants, even though he may be 'poor' by the standards of his own class. The really astonishing thing, however, is to hear an Indian Socialist talk about 'The Masses' whilst a dirty-looking, downtrodden, dumb specimen of 'The Masses' passes noiselessly in and out of the room on menial duties.

The failure of imagination in such a case is much more glaring,

and it becomes evident that the social principles under discussion are totally unrelated to the immediate situation. Indeed, if there is one country more than another where domestic servants might organise themselves with advantage, it is India. Here is the grand opportunity of the urban intelligentsia, with prospects as revolutionary as they could desire. But it is easier to talk about the politicians in Delhi. One very able young man, it is true, twice in my hearing proclaimed the 'Revolt of the Sweepers' as a sovereign remedy for India's evils; but he showed no haste to work for this end, and even added the remarkable rider that the revolt should be led by Dr Ambedkar – a man whose whole career has depended upon qualities diametrically opposed to those of a revolutionary leader. So my friend's proposal, which included a somewhat ruthless extermination of conservative elements in India remains as academic as the rest of the bright political chatter.

The genius of Gandhi lay very largely in his insistence on the application of general principles to one's personal life before attempting to apply them more widely. Thus a test of sincerity was provided, also a training in the method of approach which was typical of Gandhi's many campaigns. It is often said, especially in Western countries, that Gandhi succeeded in India because India is 'more spiritual' than the West, which is assumed to be more materialist. This version of events has been fostered by some Indians because it flatters their self-esteem; and many Europeans have a bad conscience about India which makes them the more ready to swallow it. I could never see the slightest evidence for this opinion, unless one accepts (say) the building of a Hindu temple by a successful *bania* as proof of his spirituality. In that case our own Christian missions might as well be thrown into the balance; but I doubt if it is possible to make a general assessment of either contribution. If men and women are to be assessed according to their lives and actions, only a minority of those who profess any religion of which I have any knowledge would pass the test of being primarily guided by really 'spiritual' motives.

The common mistake that has been made with regard to this point has led to a double misconception on the part of many who have tried to evaluate the part played by Gandhiji. First, by assuming that he worked on peculiarly favourable soil they have completely underestimated the personal importance of Gandhi. The conditions in which he worked were anything but favourable. The

shallow nature of the supposedly ancient and traditional roots of *ahimsa* in India was demonstrated before he died; for the miracle is that he controlled that volcano of violence for so long. And again, the appeal which Gandhiji made to the educated people to leave their pampered lives in order to serve the poorest people in the land was – as I have tried to show – quite foreign to the national tradition. A man might indeed, once he has exhausted the pomp and vanity of this world, seek personal salvation as a *sadhu* – but certainly not as a sweeper. Yet that was exactly the type of work Gandhi would ask him to do first, that he might know more of the lives of the 'Masses' and be identified with them.

Secondly, owing to this popular error about Gandhi's work – or so I believe – the applicability of his methods (adapted, of course, to the given situation) has been overlooked when considering other countries, and especially those of the West. Obsessed by the idea that Gandhi worked on 'favourable soil' the notion has been tacitly accepted that his methods would not be equally applicable in another country, with a different religious and cultural heritage. In many ways I believe that – in contradiction to this assumption – some Western countries would actually offer more favourable opportunities for the development of certain methods associated with the name of Gandhi. We have reached a crisis in our Western civilisation, and all intelligent people know it. We know more than India knows of the fatal results of our own past policies – so much so that it is astonishing to hear Indians talk lightly of war or uncritically of industrialisation. And, above all, our educated classes are not as decadent, generally considered.

In such circumstances it may well be that Gandhi will share the fate of so many other prophets, whose ultimate effect has been most deeply felt outside their own countries. I leave this thought entirely to the reflections of the reader – my present and last concern here is to examine briefly the lasting effects of Gandhi's work in the Indian villages.

CHAPTER TWELVE

This word learning is taken in a narrower sense among us than among other nations. We seem to restrain it only to the book, whereas, any artisan whatsoever (if he know the secret and mystery of his trade) may be called a learned man – a good mason, a good shoemaker . . . these, with such-like dexterous artisans, may be termed learned men, and the more behoveful for the subsistence of a country than those polymathists that stand poring all day in a corner upon a moth-eaten author, and converse only with dead men. . . . There is not a simpler animal and a more superfluous member of a state than a mere scholar.

JAMES HOWELL

HOWELL'S *Familiar Letters* were written in the seventeenth century, when a false conception of education had corrupted the values of only a small minority in this country. This makes it the more interesting that he should have deplored tendencies in that direction which he already saw. As to the printed word, it is surprising to read so early in its history Howell's opinion that the art of printing 'may be said to be well near as fatal as gunpowder'. You might think he had been reading the *Daily Express.*

Nai Talim (Basic Education), as I have already indicated, represents an educational revolution in a country where education has been more purely academic than it is in most parts of the world and more ludicrous in its irrelevance to any social realities. The characteristics of the new system may be briefly summarised as follows:

(1) The object of *Nai Talim* is to educate people to face their personal and social problems. In a primarily agricultural country, such as India, where the vast majority live in villages, this means first of all an education which will make people better members of a rural community.[1] An educational system which merely equips the most intelligent village children for professional or clerical jobs is worse than useless – it takes them away from the centres where

[1] Most Basic Education enthusiasts are also believers in economic and political de-centralisation. Consequently their conception of urban education is influenced by this belief and *Nai Talim* may even be the best way of bringing about such de-centralisation. I shall return to this question later.

their intelligence is most needed and generally unfits them, temperamentally and in every other way, for a rural life.

(2) The central place in this education is therefore occupied by agriculture and the crafts. As there is much room for improvement in Indian agriculture and village crafts this is not merely a matter of 'learning trades' but of acquiring improved methods by experiment.

(3) The school is considered as part of the community and the incentives to work are the pleasure of work itself and the satisfaction of co-operative service. No competitive inducements are offered.

(4) A main barrier in the path of educational progress in India has always been the poverty of the country, which has made a wide-spread system impossible on grounds of finance. *Nai Talim* aims at making schools economically self-supporting so far as this is possible.

(5) In the case of the middle-class, *Nai Talim* creates for their children a sense of the dignity of manual labour which is so conspicuously lacking in India among members of that class.

'Book learning' in such schools takes its places naturally as a corollary of practical knowledge. When I was at school I was taught a great deal of geography and some geology, most of which meant very little to me because I had no real contact with the soil. In history books I read of the Guilds, the Industrial Revolution and so on. But as I had only the haziest notions as to how cloth was made, how houses were built or about the lives of the people who produced any of the things in daily use, I was frankly bored and learnt very little social history.

'Basic' is used, in a narrower sense, to describe schools run on the principles outlined above, for children between the ages of seven and fifteen. 'Pre-Basic' schools have been started for younger children and 'Post-Basic' schools for boys and girls of fifteen and older. But the term 'Basic Education' is used to cover all such schools and – as its exponents understand such education – it ends only with life itself. They would not agree with the young American who put the single word 'Educated' on a wire to his family, after he had passed his finals. Before saying anything about particular schools it may be best to explain each of the five principles in further detail.

First there is the most 'basic' of all problems – that of feeding the population of India, which would not have enough to eat even if the food at present available were fairly distributed. The *kisan* is no fool. For many things he has been praised by distinguished

agricultural experts from the West. But there are some things he has yet to learn, and one of them is the value of co-operation. There are other things about which he is liable to be prejudiced, and one of them is the use of night-soil and sewage. Basic schools, by demonstrating the value of co-operation in farming can make an enormous difference to Indian agriculture. I have already noted that my friend from Denmark was the most popular speaker in the schools of Saurashtra – that was because Denmark is rightly regarded as the model for co-operation among smallholders.

The right use of night-soil and sewage is part of the whole problem of increasing soil fertility. I have already discussed this in relation to cow dung. All the *Gandhi wallahs* engaged in constructive work seem to be alive to this problem – all *compost mentis*, so to speak – and Mirabehn has written an excellent pamphlet on the whole question, including the need for tree plantations to obviate the necessity of burning cow manure. At Sevagram I was shown a real forest of millet – 10 to 12 feet high – grown by the Basic School students on organic manure. They had left part of the field unmanured as a 'control' and there poor grain was ripening about 4 or 5 feet from the ground. Those children are learning something of vital importance, and even demonstrating it to their elders at the same time.

Drainage, irrigation and measures against soil erosion are also of the greatest importance. The British realised it far too late. In Bengal, as Sir William Willcocks pointed out some years ago, canals built 3,000 years ago fell into disuse under our rule. 'After seeing the results of seventy years of abandonment of it,' said Sir William, 'there is nothing before the country but to return to it.'[1] With the decline of the *panchayats*, which had been concerned with such matters, and the taxation of wells, local initiative disappeared. The British rulers only very slowly took up irrigation when they began to realise that it meant increase in land revenue and a profitable field of investment.[2] It was a perpetual subject of criticism on

[1] Lecture by Sir William Willcocks at Calcutta University in February 1930 on 'The Ancient System of Irrigation in Bengal and its Application to Modern Problems'. Willcocks said the system had been introduced by experts from the Euphrates and the Nile.

[2] See R. C. Dutt's *Economic History of British India*, 5th Edition, vol 1, p. 157 for taxation of wells and its effects and Vol II, p. 166 for the reasons which ultimately led to a change of policy. Dutt has also a good deal of information on the ancient irrigation system of India (Vol I, pp. 197–204, 211–214, 233 and 247.)

the part of Indians and far-sighted Englishmen in the nineteenth century that the Government pushed on with its railway programme, neglecting canals and irrigation.

'Railways,' wrote Edward Carpenter in 1900, 'do not increase the productiveness of a country. We, in the West, are liable to forget that. . . . The hides, grown in Texas, are sent 1,000 miles to Chicago to cure them, then 500 miles farther to Massachusetts, to be made into boots, and then perhaps return to Texas, to be worn; but in the East . . . this ponderous circum-locomotion (which after all is mainly for the benefit of the trader and the shareholder) is not needed.'[1]

The consequence today is that work in this field is still badly in arrears, in spite of belated efforts with regard to irrigation, mainly within the present century. Also much of the ancient skill has been lost and is only slowly being recovered. Some of the biggest British schemes of irrigation, in the Punjab, had the effect of raising the water table – with the result that nitrous salts from the sub-soil rose and ultimately spoilt the crops, after a short period of increased fertility. Such problems have to be carefully considered in devising an effective system of land drainage, irrigation and soil conservation; and many of the Basic Schools which I visited were fortunate in having on their staff experts able to give the necessary training. They can restore to rural India the knowledge of those 'ancient Native Indian engineers' whose work Sir Charles Trevelyan commended to a Parliamentary Committee, in 1873, as the model to be imitated.

Next there are the various village crafts. The immediate urgency of a revival of village industries arises from the poverty of the villagers and the fact that for months they cannot till the sun-baked soil. Any means whereby such enforced leisure could be converted into profitable employment would improve their conditions – it would mean, for example, so much less food taken from the under-fed and sold to clothe their bodies. But the attempt to revive village industries has a more far-reaching aim than this – it is part of the deliberate attempt to de-centralise the economic life of the country. Although much nonsense has been talked about de-centralisation, on both sides, I shall venture to state the case for it briefly, without sentimentalising about the Middle Ages or indulging in any of the untenable economic theories with which I have sometimes heard it supported.

[1] *Empire in India and Elsewhere* by Edward Carpenter, London, 1900.

I believe that – other things being equal – a small, rural community is in every way healthier than a large, urban community. It should be politically healthier simply because it really can be a community – a living democracy – which cannot be achieved in the impersonal relationships of urban life and mass-production industry. It should be healthier physically because rural conditions, at their best, must be more healthy than those of town and factory, however much it is sought to improve them. In de-centralised communities every individual can take his share in healthy outdoor work and there is always a supply of fresh, home-grown produce. I have already discussed the 'Law of Return' in relation to de-centralisation, and it should be clear that if this law is to be respected de-centralisation is inevitable. This does not mean that certain urban populations cannot be, for a time, maintained in better conditions than certain rural populations. They can be and they have been – but this has only been possible by the systematic plundering of rural areas (e.g. of India) in order to provide townsmen (e.g. of Britain) with a high standard of living. That is a predatory system; and in the long run it destroys the source of its own false prosperity. Since the Law of Return cannot be observed under such conditions the tribute must ultimately be dried up by soil exhaustion. That is what happened to the African provinces of the Roman Empire. And in times of famine a parasitic urban civilisation will ultimately prove more vulnerable than the impoverished rural communities which feed it.

I believe that the alarming increase in nervous diseases among the more 'civilised' nations will be found to bear a direct relation to the extent to which people are divorced from the soil and unable to engage in creative work, their bodies fed upon highly processed and devitalised foods and their minds on palliatives and stimulants devised to recompense them for work in which they find no pleasure. In an earlier chapter I made it clear that I have no objection to machinery, as such. Nor had Gandhi.[1] But the use of any machine should be considered, not merely in relation to its productive capacity, still less in terms of somebody's dividends. Greater productive capacity can only be justified if the workers involved in it live a better life. A craftsman who was a disciple of William Morris once told me that he was in favour of the maximum mechanisation

[1] Gandhi used to point out that the spinning wheel is itself a machine. Among the more elaborate devices the use of which is consistent with de-centralisation and craftmanship is the ordinary sewing machine.

of drudgery. 'Give me,' he said, 'a machine that will make it unnecessary for men to empty dustbins or spend their lives in coal mines.'

I agree. I saw in India some jobs – such as the binding of books by hand and the hand-setting of type in a press at Ahmedabad – which I would call drudgery; and I would favour their mechanisation in small, de-centralised units, on the understanding that any purely mechanical work should be shared out among the community. But the making of any object which can give creative satisfaction to the maker should be considered first in relation to that satisfaction – it is a psychological necessity which we sacrifice at our peril for mere quantity. In agriculture both quality and quantity are sacrificed to profit, at the cost of posterity, when mass-production methods are applied. Dust bowls are a direct result of large-scale farming for immediate profit. The maximum yield per acre of the finest quality products without loss to the soil can only be achieved by intensive cultivation, which means personal attention to every patch of ground. Commercially it may not be so profitable as raping the earth – so long as that racket will last – but that merely illustrates the difference between commercial and real values.

I recognise that a de-centralised society would involve a simpler way of living – less gadgets and less clutter in the houses of those who now measure their 'standard of living' by their ability to buy such things as cars, radios, refrigerators, unnecessary furniture, superfluous clothes and expensive toys for their children. Instead we should have fewer possessions of better quality and more individual in design. We might have to work longer hours – a very heretical suggestion these days. But, speaking as one who works very long hours at a job he enjoys, I should say that my work gives me a great deal more pleasure than I could obtain from shorter hours at unpleasant work, with the 'compensation' of a regular dose of the 'flicks' (for which I now have neither time nor money). The comparison is, in fact, ludicrous. So long as he can 'make do' at all, *any* man who really enjoys his job would refuse to exchange it for something uncongenial merely for the sake of shorter hours and money for things which can never compensate him. The happiest people I know are those who are fortunate in their work; and the happiest form of work is that which gives a creative outlet together with some sense of service to a community – even if one is only a writer and the most one can hope for is to provide a little entertainment.

Finally, while we live in a world of booms, slumps, competition and the Law of Grab I believe that the de-centralised community, as self-sufficient as it can be made, offers the greatest possible security. The arteries of London are at the mercy of foreign monopolists, strikes, lock-outs or a few well-placed bombs. Even the weather can freeze its water supply and its system of sanitation, with an aftermath of burst pipes which place us once more at the mercy of a foreign body – the plumber. I remember once leaving London in mid-winter with its frozen pipes and drains, its rationed coal, its restricted gas and electricity, and going to 'de-centralised' Connemara. Almost everything that one needed to live happily there grew within two hundred yards of my wife's cottage. The spring never froze, there was nothing in our outdoor sanitation that could go wrong, and there was as much fuel as I cared to cut from the woods.

Basic Education aims at preserving every tendency to self-sufficiency in the villages and increasing it. Its ultimate effects, if successful, would include the de-centralisation of Indian society as a whole. Towns would remain, but they would be smaller. A few centralised 'key industries' would remain, but they need not be many. And all that I have tried to picture in this brief survey of what de-centralisation would involve is implicit in the *Nai Talim* programme. The ultimate aim is the minimum 'trade' and the minimum 'employment' (equitably divided) consistent with the production of a sufficient quantity of the best quality goods in the best possible working conditions, to serve human needs. The object and the methods differ equally from those of capitalism and those of bureaucratic state socialism.

Fortunately the skill is still to be found in India, though often the tools and traditional methods need much improvement, with which Basic Education is much concerned. On my first visit to India I was amazed at the skill of village craftsmen. I remember some ivory elephants, so small that they could not be properly seen without a magnifying lens, though they had been carved without any such assistance. It is, however, typical of the false values current in a society which has lost all real respect for the craft and the craftsman that people confine their ideas of 'art' to such toys as these. What is even more extraordinary is the fact that English travellers who have been to the East will actually boast of the small sums they paid the men whose work they will expect you to admire. I knew a woman whose flat was packed with such plunder – the result of years spent

in India – but she always spoke with loathing and contempt about Indians. You were expected to admire her possessions, and her for possessing them (also her astuteness in beating down the price) – anything and anybody, in fact, except the people who had done the work. Basic Education teaches people that it is highly creditable to be able to make a pair of sandals, but that there is absolutely no credit in having the money to pay for them.

In 1930 I met Sir Jagadis Bose, the celebrated Indian botanist, in London, and I saw some of his remarkable experiments with plants. He told me that he could not get his delicate machines repaired anywhere in England or Germany. They had been made in Bengal, where skill (he said) had not been 'ruined by mass-production'. At first he could not obtain, even in Bengal, the high standard of workmanship which he required. Then he had an idea. He worked on the very principle which *Nai Talim* was later to develop, the complete co-ordination of hand and mind. His mechanics were given a six months' course in plant biology. After that they produced perfect machines. Many of them, in 1930, were doing experiments of their own.

About the same time I visited an English 'progressive school', where I was expected to admire a new power lathe that had cost £200. All I said was that the last lathe I had seen must have cost about twopence and worked admirably. It was the type used by many an Indian carpenter. Two wedges in the ground held the chair leg (or whatever was being turned) between a couple of spikes. Around the chair leg was twisted the string of a bow, and it revolved as the carpenter pulled the bow towards him with his left hand. His right hand guided the chisel, supported between the toes of his right foot. And the pace at which he turned out chair legs and walking sticks was amazing. To learn that way is to acquire real skill and self-sufficiency. You do not need capital, and nothing can go wrong which you cannot put right yourself. Even more interesting to me (as I did once throw a few pots myself) is the skill of the Indian potter. His wheel spins like a top, its axle resting on the earth in a small hollow. You would never imagine, to see the excellent vessels which he produces so rapidly, that his wheel had been wobbling all the time. Here there may be room for improved methods; but what I am emphasising is the existence of remarkable skill. And who in his senses would not rather live that way than spend his days in the Black Country?

There could not be a greater contrast than that which one notices in India between the inefficiency, slowness and general hopelessness of Indian clerks (e.g. in a bank or post office) and the skill and speed of an Indian craftsman. The pleasant young stenographer – a young man of exceptional ability – who worked for Vera Brittain and me at Santiniketan and Sevagram was one of the few sedentary workers I ever met in India who seemed to me to have any 'grip' on his job. Generally speaking I am convinced that Indian genius finds its best expression in skilled manual labour. It is a country of natural artists; but a bad system of education has turned vast numbers of these artists into fifth-rate clerks. A world without clerks would be a great improvement. A world without artists is unthinkable.

When that Army Chaplain invited me to the Officers' Mess, shortly before I left Sabarmati in 1930, I was asked many questions about spinning. 'But it's surely a very difficult process,' said one officer (according to my journals) 'and how are they all to learn?' I pointed out that I, with no natural ability for such things, had learnt after a fashion. 'But my dear man,' said the officer, 'you surely can't judge by that – you don't put yourself on the level of the native, do you?' The true answer would have been, of course, that I certainly did not. I know that if I can learn anything at all about a craft, almost any Indian child can achieve perfection in that craft in a matter of years, or even of months.

With spinning, as with carpentry and pottery, the apparatus requires a negligible capital. At the A.I.S.A. Training Centre, near Sevagram, they have designed a spinning wheel made entirely of bamboo, except for the spindle, and the whole thing can be constructed in two days. A child might as well do that as make toy cranes out of 'Meccano'; and there would be much more point to it. There is a great deal of ingenuity being used at such centres now in the invention of new machines; but they must be cheap, adapted to home use and preferably made of indigenous and easily accessible material, so that once the design is perfected the villagers can copy it themselves.

Much has been done to break down 'untouchability' by having *Harijans* on the staff of schools and training centres, and by allocating to students, on a rota basis, all the unpleasant chores usually left to outcastes. Mr Squeers obviously had his faults. But I think his methods were in certain respects ahead of his time and ours. 'C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour,' was in some

sense an anticipation of *Nai Talim* when the active verb was applied to the window.

Special training centres for village workers are run on similar lines, and include methods of village self-government in their curriculum – one of these I visited at Shahpur, near Junagadh, where villagers came for a two year course that included spinning, weaving, leather work, dairy farming, agriculture, economics, history and methods of co-operation. I also visited other *Harijan* centres, similar to the colony at Sabarmati; and at one (outside Delhi) I met the man who, next to Gandhi, had done most for these people – Amritlal Thakkur of the *Servants of India*. (He celebrated his eightieth birthday two days later.) From 'Thakkur Baba', whom I had met briefly in 1930, I gathered that, generally speaking, the whole pattern of *Harijan* work is closely in line with that of Basic Education.

India's ultimate problem will not be the untouchables, but the unteachables. What troubled Gandhi most was 'the hardness of heart of the educated.' In *ashram* circles the pendulum has swung so heavily against orthodox education that the mere possession of a university degree is presumptive evidence against anyone. One has, of course, to remember that the English language has been the medium of instruction in most Indian universities, and that most university products know more about English literature and history (though lacking a comprehensive grasp of either) than they do about the history and culture of their own country. The exceptions to this have been the students of the 'National Universities' set up under Congress inspiration during the present century.

At one of these – the Gujerat Vidyapith – I was interested to see that a large library had been acquired since 1930, and I enquired about this. I was told that, under the Copyright Act, copies of all publications had been sent to Delhi, where no attempt had been made, under British rule, to build up a library. Books had merely been stored. Now an effort was being made to use them, and all Gujerati publications had been sent to this college. Hence a beginning had been made in the creation of a first-class Gujerati library. This attempt to re-create scholarship in the languages and culture of India is very typical. With it goes a tendency to regard the traditional culture of the villages with reverence – not uncritically, but with recognition that 'real' culture must be based upon this and not upon the hybrid scholarship of the orthodox universities. which

does not attempt to be Indian and pathetically fails to be English. The organisers of the *Nai Talim* programme have already arranged for Basic Education to be carried up to university standards; and at the time when I left India the equivalent of a 'post-graduate' course on Basic lines was under consideration.

The strong emphasis on agriculture and the crafts is conducive to the creation of an independent spirit among the children of the Basic Schools, especially as they realise the extent to which their schools have become economically self-supporting. But independence is also implicit in the relationship between staff and scholars. Self-government is cultivated by the experience of freedom. The staff share in all the work: there is, of course, no 'domestic staff', for the students and their teachers do all the cooking, cleaning, etc., themselves. In school self-government there is an opportunity to discover the value of co-operation, but this can only be fully developed when co-operation is applied to the economy of the community. When I was at school I used to hear a great deal about the 'team spirit', but it meant little to me because it was only applied to games, and the basis of games is competitive. You cannot really develop a sense of co-operation in community service by learning to play team games. If that were so the schools which have made the biggest fetish of games would have turned out hosts of socialists, syndicalists and communists (with a small 'c'). This is not noticeably the case; and the reason is that this 'team spirit' is not applied at the level of production or for any real service to any community.

That is where the *Nai Talim* method strikes at the root of our competitive and predatory social system. It pre-supposes, of course, example on the part of the staff and therefore requires a body of devoted and disciplined workers with all the fervour of a religious Order; and that is exactly how I would describe the *Nai Talim* teachers. They work very hard, give their whole lives to the job, expect little material reward and certainly receive little enough. A cheap and universal system of education could never have been devised for such a poor country without this sense of vocation, so foreign to modern thought in the West. These teachers will indignantly deny that they are 'self-sacrificing'. As Asha Devi put it: 'Doing what you want to do is not sacrifice but fulfilment.' Asha Devi and her husband, E. W. Arya Nayakam, are among the leading personalities today in the development of *Nai Talim.*

This brings us to the fourth point, regarding the cost of education. It is kept down partly by the service of these devotees, who work for little because they love the work and the children – and unless they loved the children sufficiently to do that they would, in fact be of no use in a *Nai Talim* school. They live very much like the peasants whose children they teach. At Sevagram, where there is a residential Basic School, the total cost of board and tuition averages only Rs 18 (about twenty-seven shillings) per month for each child between seven and fifteen years of age. Of this sum *one third is covered by the productive work of the children.* I have similar figures for Basic Schools in many other parts of the country. These costs should be compared with those of the Girls Boarding School at Porbandar (Rs 55 per month for each girl, of which Rs 20 is covered by subsidies from the founder). After deducting the value of the children's work, the net costs of Sevagram will be seen to be only 21.5 per cent. of the costs at Porbandar. A European boarding school in Northern India charges at the rate of Rs 160 per month. The net cost at Sevagram is a mere 7.5 per cent. of that figure.

In 'Post-Basic' schools (aged 15 and over) the cost is Rs 20 per month, *the whole of which is met by the productive work of the students,* so that they are *entirely self-supporting.* I have heard it suggested that this is exploitation of child labour. I do not know whether it is worth discussing. I should have thought that 'exploitation' could only exist if the object were to make money for somebody or if the hours or conditions of work were bad. These children work in pleasant conditions; and the sole object is to provide them with an education which they could not obtain at all except for these efforts of their own. It is also a very much better education than they could hope to obtain any other way, whilst the very fact that they have so largely earned it themselves must surely give them a fine spirit of independence. And that covers my fifth point about re-asserting the dignity of labour among the middle-class children, who are permitted to share this spirit of independence with the children of peasants and labourers.

I was interested to hear from an Egyptian delegate at our conference that experiments not unlike this had been successfully carried out in Egypt. The possibility of applying *Nai Talim* principles to Africa was naturally a subject of discussion among us, and it caught the imagination of Michael Scott. Indeed, I feel convinced myself that much could be done in Africa on these lines. How far

such methods can be adapted to the needs of the West I cannot discuss here at length; but the system does correspond in its general outline with what I always felt (even as a child) to be the proper character of a school – a community of equals, as self-supporting as possible, in which all took a share in all the necessary work.

Many objections would be raised, of course, with regard to the further extension of the crafts, regarded mainly as 'hobbies' where they have any place at all in our educational system. It is a curious fact, however, that when our civilisation has produced its inevitable nervous disorders and mental breakdowns[1] we immediately turn to the crafts as a cure. 'Occupational Therapy' is, to the best of my knowledge, the only method which has a fairly steady record of success in this sphere; and that is more than can be said for drugs or electric shocks. (As for psycho-analysis, I have never yet met a single person who has been subjected to it who was not manifestly the worse for treatment.) Perhaps the only way to get a decent education for everyone in this green and pleasant land would be to have the entire population 'certified'. All of us could then enjoy the advantages of 'occupational therapy' at present confined to the privileged few.

In a selected district of Bihar Basic Schools have been functioning very successfully since 1938, uninterrupted – as such schemes were in other Provinces – by the political upheavals which preceded *Swaraj*. But in most parts of India *Nai Talim* is still something new. However, by last December 560 teachers, trained in these methods at Sevagram, had gone like missionaries to all parts of the country; and meanwhile over seventy other training centres for *Nai Talim* teachers had been started – one of these being at Santiniketan. By the end of 1949 there were 450 to 500 Basic Schools established plus twelve 'Pre-Basic' and two 'Post-Basic'. The disproportion of training centres to schools is indicative. The demand for teachers trained in these methods is already much greater than the supply, and progress is retarded mainly by this fact. The seventy to eighty

[1] I am informed, for example, that in the United States the number of persons in mental institutions or undergoing some form of mental treatment during any one year is about one tenth of the total population. I have been unable to check this estimate but find it quite credible. The nature of our own social, economic and political life proves that the majority and its chosen leaders (of all parties) might reasonably be described as 'border-line cases', to put it with all possible consideration and tact. Moreover, so much attention is now given to 'juvenile delinquency' that I find the complete neglect of senile delinquency on the highest levels quite inexplicable. Consider our own Judges, Bishops and Cabinet Ministers.

training centres are not, obviously, intended merely to maintain staffs for the existing schools but to carry out a vast extension project which should increase by geometrical progression. Most of the existing schools are state-aided; but I sensed a clear determination among the *Nai Talim* workers to maintain the integrity of their principles against any attempt at government interference – particularly any threat of compulsory military training, with which most 'Basic' teachers would refuse to co-operate in any way.[1]

These schools, since they aim at creating a model of community living, are, of course, co-educational. There is no dogmatic religious teaching, but a real effort is made to explain the teachings of the principle religions; and the beautiful chants which are part of the indigenous culture are used at appointed times. In these the children join with obvious enthusiasm; and some of the loveliest singing I heard in India was upon such occasions – particularly the solos by very small children[2] at Sabarmati. I do not propose here to enter into the general controversy regarding religion in schools. I am convinced myself that in the Basic Schools it is a normal and natural thing, because it is a religion of love and not of fear which pervades the teaching. The religious chants provide spiritual and emotional release no less normal than that which is found in the traditional dances.

Throughout my last visit to India I was frequently seeing Basic Schools and other institutions which are still carrying out Gandhi's 'Constructive Programme', but except (to some extent) in the case of my first experience at Sabarmati I have avoided detailed description of such institutions, as the general pattern was much the same in each new place. To a large extent I was also able to share the experience of delegates who travelled to places which I never visited and (better still) to talk to workers from such places. Dick Keithahn[3] for example, gave me a most interesting account of the

[1] There is reason to believe that – apart from certain individuals – the official support being given to *Nai Talim* is very half-hearted. There are historical and sentimental reasons for this support; but the revolutionary implications of this educational system must already have caused consternation in Government circles.

[2] I remember especially the voices of some of the girls. Why, I wonder, are the voices of most Indian women so hard and shrill when Indian girls can sing so sweetly?

[3] He is one of at least three Westerners directly concerned with Basic Education. One, Donald Groom, started the school near Hoshangabad, already mentioned, as a new development in Quaker work. Marjorie Sykes, also a member of the Society of Friends, and joint author of an excellent life of Charlie Andrews, has for years been teaching at Sevagram.

Basic School where he now works, in the South, at 'Gandhigram'. Almost every school had, within the general pattern, some distinctive feature of its own. At Gandhigram, for example, the school 'Government', instead of being open to re-election by the scholars, is replaced on a rota system which gives each child in turn the experience of leading – and of following. The head of another school in the South (which I would like to have visited) sent some of us an interesting letter which showed, to my mind, a healthy distrust of politics and of all governments whatsoever as methods of 'concentration of Power in Society'. My general conclusion from all that I saw, heard and read was that the system was not only sound in theory, but faithfully carried out in practice, with excellent and rapidly extending results.

In 'Pre-Basic' teaching Montessori methods are often used. This at first surprised me, for I knew that Gandhiji had not originally responded favourably to the introduction of these methods. In a letter to Verrier Elwin's colleague Shamrao Hivale (from 'Yerawda Mandir'[1] June 23rd, 1932) Gandhi had approved of the underlying principles but said that 'the way this method is being practised is wholly foreign to the Indian atmosphere. We cannot afford to spend so much money.' Since then, however, it had been found possible to adapt Montessori methods, using natural objects or home-made ones to replace what Bapu had called 'expensive toys'. I mention this last point to show the willingness of these 'constructive workers' to learn from the West, when the West has anything worth teaching. Gandhi himself was never hostile to Western thought, as such, nor – as this instance shows – was he unable to change his mind. The question which concerns me much more is whether Western minds are not too inflexible and dogmatic to consider the implications of this new system in India and to adapt it to our own needs just as Indians adapted Montessori methods to theirs.

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The last time I saw Mordecai Johnson was in Delhi. He seemed almost transfigured by his experience in India, and it was clearly the idea of Basic Education which, above all other things, he wanted to take back and share with his fellow countrymen in America.

In the last and most memorable speech I heard him make he

[1] Literally 'Yerawda Temple'. That is to say, the prison at Poona.

pictured for us a world where every common object made by human skill would mean much more to you than the price you paid for it or even its utility. He spoke, I remember, of the skill in the making of a pair of shoes. These were things we took for granted because we had neither made a pair nor had to go without them. But he came himself of a people among whom the mere posession of a pair of shoes had once been something to make a song about: 'I got shoes, you got shoes, all God's chillun's got shoes.' The deep, rich voice slipped into song, without effort and without a trace of self-consciousness. Somehow Mordecai expressed just the thing so many of us had been learning in those months. When you have seen real destitution you know how little a man needs, materially speaking. And when you know something of the growing and the making of things you feel a sense of wonder because the little that man needs may still cost so much in labour, knowledge and training.

Most of us came from countries where we had been pampered. Some of us had thought we were poor because our 'standards of living' had been slightly lowered. But now we had seen people content and happy on so much less and we had discovered the true nature of our own poverty: it was an inner poverty – the poverty of the rich, which they call being bored. Gandhi was never bored for one minute. He was one of the happiest men I have ever known; and maybe even that is an understatement. If life itself is to be the measure, Gandhi's 'standard of living' was about as high as could be. We did not imagine we had 'all the answers', but a study of *Nai Talim* had given many of us a good few clues. While in India I had read the words of Kurt Hahn, the Headmaster of Gordonstown: 'The educational system of this country has not accepted the responsibility of finding the antidote against a poisonous civilisation.' True enough – but that was exactly the responsibility which *Nai Talim* had, in fact, accepted. Kurt Hahn had even admitted of his own school that it was 'intimidated, like the rest, by the tyranny of the examination system.'[1] Basic Education is not.

[1] One delightful comment on British education is to be found in the writings of my friend, H. J. Massingham. In *Where Man Belongs* (London, 1946, page 97) he tells of a boy – a natural craftsman who was sent to the Institute of Vocational Psychology. Reporting highly on his intelligence, the Institute 'thought he would be unsatisfied doing a job entirely in craft work and strongly advised him to try for a degree in economics and later to do a Social Administrative job'. The implication is clear – intelligence is not considered necessary or desirable in real work.

It was not possible for me then, and it is still not possible, to see far in this matter; but if life has taught me anything at all it is the futility of trying to calculate the results of any course of action, or even to judge by what we *call* 'results' after the event – because results are never complete. People think they are working for one object and find that they have achieved something quite different; or if they fancy they have done what they set out to do, a later generation may find reason to take a very different view. One could illustrate this with reference to wars, revolutions, inventions, medical science or almost anything that has affected human history. We never know the end to which we are moving. All we know is the means which we are using. I have come to the belief that if we take care of the means the ends can take care of themselves; and *Nai Talim* is for me an outstanding example of the right means.

I know no more than that. It may or may not be possible to achieve world peace and a society from which money and power have been eliminated – the kind of society I want to see. Meanwhile all I know is that, if I want peace and that kind of society, the place to start is here; the time, now; the people, my immediate associates; and the means are the direct application to the present situation of the principles I wish to establish in the future. *Nai Talim* applies this method to the most vital of all our problems if we are concerned with the future of man – the sphere of education in its broadest sense.

More than once, as I looked at the zealots of this new faith, who are the salt of the Indian earth, I recalled again Vachel Lindsay's *Eagle That Is Forgotten*. But the words that came to my mind were not those which had come to me when I read the news of Gandhi's death. In place of them I recalled those lines of triumph:

> *A hundred white eagles have risen, the sons of your sons,*
> *The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming began,*
> *The valour that wore out your soul in the service of man.*

The Eagle is not forgotten.